

new zealand gardener

JULY 2015

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HOW TO NOMINATE

1. **Send us a letter** or visit nzgardener.co.nz, and tell us why you or someone you know deserves to be our 2015 GARDENA Gardener of the Year. We're looking for community leaders, inspirational mentors, the driving force behind a veggie-growing food bank or someone who is beautifying their town or restoring wasteland. It could be anything... basically if a gardener has inspired you, let us know! Include your name and phone number plus contacts for the nominated gardener, or for a contact person if it's a group.
2. **Send nominations to** 2015 GARDENA Gardener of the Year, *NZ Gardener*, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland. You can also enter on our website, nzgardener.co.nz.
3. **Nominations run** from June 29-August 30.
4. **Five finalists will be** announced in the October issue of *NZ Gardener*.
5. **Vote!** One finalist will be selected as the overall GARDENA Gardener of the Year based on the results of a public vote. Full instructions will be in the October and November issues.
6. **GARDENA's 2015 Gardener of the Year** will be announced in the December issue.

Terms and conditions: 1. Nominations close on August 30, 2015. 2. Acceptance of the prizes is deemed consent to use the winners' details and photographs for publicity purposes. 3. The judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 4. The prizes cannot be transferred, exchanged or redeemed for cash. 5. This competition is open to New Zealand residents only.

A MESSAGE FROM GOLD SPONSORS GARDENA

Gardena has enjoyed supporting Kiwis over the years and whether you're a seasoned professional or just started developing your green thumb, we look forward to seeing your inspiration and passion in this year's Gardena Gardener of the Year.

We wish all of the entries success, and happy gardening from the Gardena Team.

2015
gardener
of the year



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CHARLIE ALBONE GETS THE GREEN THUMBS UP AT 2015 CHELSEA FLOWER SHOW

Charlie Albone has taken a Silver-Gilt at the 2015 Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Chelsea Flower Show. Judges gave the 'Selling Houses Australia' garden guru an award for his intimate and emotive design, 'The Time in Between'. The garden was a representation of the designer's life and was dedicated to his late father.

Sponsored by GARDENA, the premium watering solutions brand, and Husqvarna, the leader in outdoor power equipment, Charlie's garden featured more than 80 different plant and tree varieties. The garden also included a custom water feature measuring four and a half metres wide, and a sand stone fire pit.

After more than 18 months designing and planning, Charlie and his team of ten landscapers were given just 19 days to build the garden. The team used Husqvarna and GARDENA tools to prune, trim, dig and plant their way to a winning spot.

"Being nominated to showcase at the Chelsea Flower Show is an unbelievable honour in and of itself. The fact that I have achieved a Silver-Gilt is just the cherry on top! This is not just a great milestone for me professionally, but also a very personal achievement. I have always wanted to find the right way to share my life with my father since losing him when I was 17, and this was the perfect opportunity to do it."

"A team of brilliant landscapers helped bring my vision to life, and I cannot thank them enough for the long, hard hours they put in over the course of the build. Husqvarna and Gardena are two brands that I have always loved to use, and they've helped me fulfil a lifelong professional and personal dream, which is something I will always be grateful for," says Charlie.





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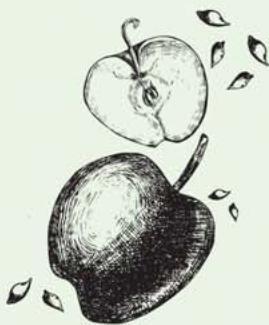
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*"It is remarkable
how closely the
history of the apple
tree is connected
with that of man"*
Henry David Thoreau



At the moment I am reading a book by the American journalist, writer and food activist Michael Pollan called *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World*, which is about the way we selectively grow, breed and engineer certain plants. In the chapter on apples, he writes: "More than any other single trait, it is the apple's genetic variability – its ineluctable wildness – that accounts for its ability to make itself at home in places as different from one another as New England and New Zealand, Kazakhstan and California.

"Wherever the apple tree goes," Pollan continues, "its offspring propose so many different variations on what it means to be an apple – at least five per apple, several thousand per tree – that a couple of these novelties are almost bound to have whatever qualities it takes to prosper in the tree's adopted home."

Apples, you see, do not grow true to type. The only way to ensure that you grow a particular sort – 'Cox's Orange', say, or 'Granny Smith' – is to plant a grafted tree. "Apples are identical to human beings in how they reproduce," is how Robyn Guyton put it to me. "An apple tree grown from seed might produce fruit that has a stalk like its great-grandmother, stripes like its great-grandfather, a thick skin like its brother, and spots from so far back along the family tree no one even remembers." (A caveat: apple trees are perhaps not *exactly* identical in how they reproduce to human beings, or if they are then I have *substantially* misunderstood the birds and the bees. But I take Robyn's wider point.)

Robyn is something of an expert on apple varieties because of the work she and her husband Robert have been doing as part of the open orchard project, which they started with the aim of finding and propagating the old apple varieties planted by the very first settlers in Southland. (I wrote about this in our May issue.) So when my sister Kate, who lives in Christchurch, asked me to help identify an apple that grew in her neighbour's garden – yellow-green fruit, very tart and dense, with outstanding flavour when cooked – I immediately called on Robyn's expertise. Robyn told me it sounded similar to a few apple varieties she knew but, given how many varieties there are, the best thing would be for my sister to post her three pieces of fruit. (With so many apple varieties out there, there are more than 30 characteristics that need to be recorded and compared to confirm an apple variety.)

Because apples do not grow true, Robyn told me, the gnarled trees you see beside old roads and railways are likely to be unique – grown from randomly dropped cores and offering a new blend of the characteristics on offer from the family tree (ho ho). That can result in unexpected but desirable outcomes. The apple 'Monty's Surprise', which was shown in studies to have the highest level of cancer-fighting compounds of the 250 apple varieties analysed by scientists, was found entirely by chance as a wild seedling in the backblocks of Whanganui by Mark Christensen, research director at the Heritage Food Crops Research Trust.

What if this apple was likewise a wild seedling? I thought to myself. What if it turned out to be the greatest cooking apple in the world? We could have a competition and let NZ *Gardener* readers name it, I thought excitedly. (Hint: the judges, although completely impartial, would strongly favour any entries suggesting calling it 'NZ Gardener' or possibly 'Jo').

But alas, my plans have hit a snag. On seeing the fruit, Robyn identified it as an old French cooking apple, 'Reinette du Canada', widely planted around New Zealand. Ah well! My plans to dominate the world apple pie market will have to be shelved...

Jo

Jo McCarroll



PLANT MORE IF YOU WANT BIRDS

I am now watching some goldfinches enjoying the seedheads of zinnias. Admittedly the plants look untidy but it is little to pay for the pleasure in watching these birds hanging upside down enjoying a feast. The birds must be very light as they scarcely moved the flowers as they hung from the stem. I also have a lavender hedge which is very popular with the bees going into winter. I just need to discourage neighbours from feeding the pukekos!

Pam Havill, KATIKATI

ONLY THE BEST FOR OUR BIRDS

I fully support Josie Galbraith [author of the bird feeding study we wrote about in our June issue] who says we must not feed wild birds bread or food that is not suitable for them. The tui recovery programme here in Richmond has been so successful so everyone is tuned in to the health and needs of the birds. We have a silk tree, and in it hangs a nectar feeder. A wooden tray contains fat and apples for the waxeyes, goldfinches and other fruit-eaters, water in a hanging dish and a wild bird mix for the other birds. We have a stream and a duck brings ducklings to visit each season, and I buy a 25kg bag of bird mix from Farmlands for them. Feeding the birds healthily costs money, but it is so worth it.

Yes, the three tuis that come to our nectar feeder are bossy, but they don't interrupt the smaller birds, and the two bellbirds who visit daily often sit in the same tree and wait their turn. The bird count we take part in has shown an increase in numbers of many of the bird species from one survey to the next.

I don't think people should be put off by feeding birds. If they are educated about the correct food, hygiene and keeping feeding areas separate, it can be done very successfully and bring such joy.

Wendy Cornish, RICHMOND, NELSON

OUR BIRDS LOVE PERSIMMONS!

What an interesting June issue, including two things that fascinate me: feeding birds and growing persimmons. We have put out fat for tiny birds in really bad weather but apart from that leave them to forage. But I'd say if anyone wants to attract tui, plant a persimmon! Ours is over 20 years old and large. Japanese visitors in May were fascinated by the dozens of birds feasting on the fruit. We have no trouble sharing it. This year some even went to Hong Kong with a lass who said it was expensive there. Maybe there are export opportunities!

Brenda Skinner, GLEN EDEN

MYNAHS HARM NATIVES TOO

I was very interested in your June article about the effect of feeding the birds, and the fact that putting out bread and seed brings in sparrows and pigeons. Beware: it will bring in mynahs too. A few years ago I had tui nesting near my house. I also had

chooks, and mynah were drawn to the reliable supply of chook food. One day I heard a commotion from the tui and looked up just as a raiding mynah dropped one of their fledglings from the nest to the ground. Over the next days it happened again. I had the horrible job of dispatching the mortally wounded little fledglings.

Rachel Coxhead, OTANE

SPARROWS TOOK OVER HERE

I recently hung a coconut bird feeder in a kowhai. It attracted two lovely silvereyes. They completely cleaned out the coconut and I refilled it with a mixture of dripping, bird seed and peanut butter. It was the worst thing I could have done as it brought in dozens of birds, mainly sparrows; no sign of the silvereyes. I tried another coconut feeder but this has also been taken over by sparrows. My bird feeding days are over. I will grow more plants to attract them!

Bev Cameron, GREYTOWN



HOSANNA IN EGGSHELL-SIS

I decided to try your tip in the April issue of using the water in which eggs had been boiled to promote growth on African violets – with amazing results! I also saved crushed eggshells and mixed them in the water, then fed this solution to my plants. Within a week, lots of buds appeared, and the plants were covered with flowers.

I enjoy striking new African violet plants from parent leaves, and shall be using the eggshell water to promote root development prior to planting. Thank you for the great tip!

Julie Jones, PALMERSTON NORTH

TUBER HUMOUR

You know your kumara are particularly small when your three-year-old grandson asks: “Why are you collecting cat poo, Poppa?” Out of the mouths of babes.

Michael Sommerville, BEACHLANDS

OUR BRILLIANT NEW SHED!

I was thrilled to open my *NZ Gardener* to find in the contents a DIY wood shed. We moved to our new house just seven weeks ago and ordered a wood burner straight away knowing it would take a while to get our permit. The permit arrived last week, as did the installation of our wood burner and a load of macrocarpa fire wood. My wonderful husband spent all of last week building this shed according to your plans, but a little larger. I am over the moon about our new wood shed so thank you *NZ Gardener* for the inspiration!

Kay Latham, OTAKI



MY PUMPKIN SEED QUEST

I’ve always grown pumpkins – we love them in a soup, roasted with home kill or diced on top of a pizza base with chorizo – but I’d always been a bit frustrated by preparing the seeds to eat. Not one to waste anything, I would scoop them out, clean them, then boil for 20 minutes. Even then, they were barely edible.

Only last year I realised that you need to grow different varieties depending on whether you want flesh or seeds! So I’ve been growing Austrian oil seed pumpkins (*Cucurbita pepo*) from Kings Seeds for their green seeds. These beauties have no shell, husk or cover. All I have to do is scoop the seeds out, dry and eat them raw or toast them at around 130°C for two hours. The result is delicious, and so good for you – pumpkin seeds are a nutrient powerhouse, containing magnesium, manganese, copper, protein and zinc.

I’ve read that you shouldn’t plant seed pumpkins next to your flesh pumpkins or they’ll cross-pollinate and you’ll end up with just pumpkins with edible flesh, and no edible seeds. I am keen for more edible seed harvests, so do any reader have recommendations of which pumpkins I should try my hand at growing next?

Gaye Brandford, WAIMANA



NEVER TOO BUSY FOR BULBS

My mother was a strong advocate of spring bulbs. I grew up in a quarter-acre paradise in a working-class suburb where we relied on fruit and vegetables from our garden and delighted every spring at the carpet of yellow daffodils under the trees. We felt really rich having armsful to give to the teacher, and being able to divide the bulbs and give some away to others.

Later when I was a working mum, with little time to garden, mum told me: “Plant bulbs, they will reward you at the end of winter when you most need a pick up.”

The year before she passed away, she enjoyed ordering from a bulb catalogue. She said she was possibly overly optimistic at her chances of being around to see them (she was terminally ill), but smiled as she imagined the colourful display.

When she passed away we sold her house, so we dug up some of her bulbs and shared them between us three siblings. So, now, as green shoots start to poke their heads above the soil I think of the legacy she has left in her three children. Although I miss her everyday, I know that a part of her lives on in us. And every year I find the time and money to add a few more bulbs to my collection.

Vicky Teague, CAMPBELLS BAY

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Write your name, phone number and postal address on the back of an envelope and send to Red Band Gumboots Prize Draw, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141 or enter online by visiting nzgardener.co.nz. Entries open on June 29 and close on July 27, 2015.

TERMS & CONDITIONS: The prize is the chance to win a pair of Red Band gumboots. There are 70 pairs available to be won. The winners will receive a voucher to be redeemed by Skellerup directly. Redemption instructions are stated on the voucher and the winners cannot redeem the voucher at retail outlets. Entries for this prize open on June 29 and close on July 27, 2015. The offer is available to NZ readers. Prizes are not transferable, not redeemable for cash and no exchanges will be made. Employees of Fairfax Magazines, associated sponsor(s) and their immediate families and agencies are not permitted to enter. The winners will be drawn at random within 1 week of the competition closing. If a winner cannot be contacted within 5 days, at Fairfax's option, that winner will forfeit the prizes with no right of compensation and the prize will be redrawn. Fairfax is not liable for damage to prizes sent by post or courier.



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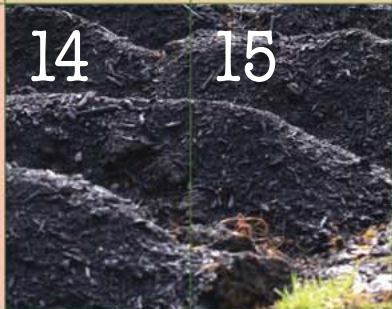
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WHAT TO SOW & PLANT

Gardening by the moon

Robert Guyton's guide to planting and sowing in harmony with the lunar cycle

MONDAY		TUESDAY		WEDNESDAY		THURSDAY		FRIDAY		SATURDAY		SUNDAY	
 July				1		2 ○ Full Moon 2:20pm		3		4		5 	
There are two full moons in July this year, the first falling on July 2 and the second “blue” moon on July 31. A month with two full moons is rare – don’t let it go by without at least noting it. July 1-4 are influenced by the first of the full moons and are good for cultivating only.													
6 July 5-6 suit the sowing of root crops, garlic and shallots.		7		8		9 ● Last Quarter		10 		11		12 July 12-13 are ideal for the application of sprays to manage orchard pests and diseases.	
13 		14 		15		16 ● New Moon 1:24pm		17		18		19	
July 14-19 is the new moon phase, when vitality is rising, which means it is suitable for soil preparation for imminent sowing. Hold back with planting for a short time.													
20 		21		22		23		24 ● First Quarter		25 		26	
July 20-27 is the prolific, fecund period for the month so get sowing! Sow all of the brassicas you love, bar Brussels sprouts, and beetroot too – they’ll thrive!													
27		28  Feed liquid fertiliser to established plants on the 28th, 29th & 30th.		29		30		31 ○ Full Moon 10:43pm Blue moon		COLOUR CODING KEY Sow and plant Cultivate only Barren period Sow root crops			

THIS MONTH...



Sow peas

• Sow sugar snaps and snow peas.

They don't mind the cold, and germinate in soil that's just 4°C or 5°C – although Cornell University research found it took up to a month for them to strike at 4°C, whereas they'll be up in a week or two when soil is 15°C. If your soil is frozen, don't bother sowing them direct. Start them in trays and transplant when they reach about 5cm high.

• Soil temperature affects all crops.

And nothing will germinate in soil that is too cold. The temperature of your soil isn't the same as the temperature of the air, either, and there's no set ratio (that I know of) to work out one from the other. Soil temperature depends on too many variables, such as whether the soil is bare or mulched, how much water it contains, whether it's in a pot and, if so, the size and colour of the pot. If you wish to know the temperature of your soil, special thermometers are sold at most garden centres. But one useful trick is to keep an eye on your weeds: cool-season weeds that emerge when the soil is 1-4°C include buckwheat, wild mustard and lambsquarters. Weeds considered warm-season, which emerge when the soil is 7°C or higher, include ragweed and the nightshade species.

• Plant certain types of fruit in pots.

Dwarf apples, nectarines and peaches (which have a compact habit but normal-sized fruit), olives, the smaller varieties of feijoa and almost all citrus (especially those grafted on dwarf rootstock) will all do well in pots, although give them a decent-sized one. A half wine barrel is an ideal – although pricey – option. Cheaper black plastic tubs of the same size are just as good if you don't mind the look; plus any black pot will act as a little heat sink, absorbing and storing the heat of the sun, thus raising the temperature of the soil inside at night. In climates where citrus or feijoas might be marginal this can help get them through winter. In fact any fruit tree would prefer to get established in warmer soil and will sit and sulk (and possibly rot and die) if plonked directly into your frozen garden.



Plant winter greens

• Plant winter salad greens in pots.

Sow miner's lettuce, spinach, lettuce, kale and mesclun salad mixes in trays and keep them in your tunnelhouse, or inside your house. You can plant out seedlings of these leafy crops now, and also celery and onion seedlings. Take the time to properly space your onion crop – leave at least 5cm between each one – so that the below-ground bulbs have room to swell up in spring and summer.

WIN winter gardening essentials from Yates!

There's still plenty to do in the garden and Yates has all you need for your winter tasks. This pack includes Yates Black Magic, Blitzem and organic vege seeds. **TO ENTER:** Write your details on the back of an envelope and mail to Yates Giveaway, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. Or enter at nzgardener.co.nz. Entries open on June 29 and close on July 26, 2015.



Yates

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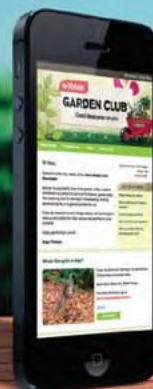
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A man with dark hair and a beard, wearing a purple button-down shirt over a blue t-shirt, sits at a green table. He holds a knife in his right hand and a fork in his left, positioned over a white plate filled with various colorful peppers (red, yellow, orange, and green). The background is a lush, out-of-focus garden with green foliage and some orange flowers.

TASTE TEST

British botanist, broadcaster and garden designer James Wong reveals the science behind better-tasting fruit and veg – and debunks plenty of gardening myths



Heirloom varieties don't always taste better. Grow new hybrid sorts the right way and the results can easily trump any old-school variety

A huge array of horticultural factors can determine how tasty your harvest will be, from sunlight and soil type to watering, pruning and even the presence of certain microbes. No, really! Research into how to tweak each of these factors to manipulate the chemicals that influence crop flavour is still in its infancy. But we hort geeks have already discovered a range of techniques that have been scientifically demonstrated to boost the eating quality of fruit and veg. Here are three of the factors.

Flavour factor 1: variety choice

All crops are not born equal.

In the great nature-nurture debate, trial after trial has shown that the single most important factor in determining crop flavour is genetics. This dictates everything from how much sugar a plant is capable of producing to the aromas it can conjure up, irrespective of its growing environment. Think of it this way: with enough make-up, stylists and airbrushing, anyone can look OK in a photo but, let's face it, supermodels were just born beautiful.

- Some sweet corn varieties contain 10 times the sugar of others.
- Some strawberries contain 35 times the aroma compounds of others.
- Some tomato cultivars have 20 times the lycopene of others.

The great limiting factor...

With concentrations of tomato aroma chemicals varying up to 3,000-fold between varieties, according to researchers at the University of California, if you get your variety choice right you are three-quarters of the way there. Clever growing techniques can make a good variety even better, but you simply cannot make a rubbish variety taste great.

Heirloom varieties don't always taste better.

Despite what die-hard romanticists will tell you, the age of a variety does not go hand-in-hand with its flavour. OK, many heirloom varieties do indeed taste incredible, being unencumbered by the 20th-century plant-breeders' fetish for the pursuit of disease-resistance and yield. However, when cutting-edge techniques are directed into seeking out flavour, the results can easily trump any old-school variety.

Take 'Sungold' tomatoes, famed for its knock-out aroma. Their quirky looks and unique taste mean they are often referred to as old-fashioned or heritage types, but it was actually bred as recently as the 1990s. If that makes it an heirloom, I suddenly feel very old!

Likewise, most heritage pea varieties taste terrible, having been bred in an age before we ate them as petits pois and instead stewed them up for hours into the stodge-fest that is pease porridge. Likewise, lovers of sweet corn will know that modern supersweet hybrids can be up to 10 times more sugary than old favourites. To say that heirlooms always taste better is nothing more than horticultural ageism.

Don't grow what you can buy.

To my mind, by far the most convincing reason to grow your own is that it allows you access to a whole world of otherwise unbuyable varieties. Take, for example, an anthocyanin-supercharged blueberry that was deemed too small by supermarkets, or the deep, melting flesh of Morello-type cherries (such as 'Oblacinska') that is just too delicate to cope with being flown across the planet. Even 'Malwina' strawberries (not available in New Zealand) which have the most incredible fragrance,

CATALOGUE TRANSLATOR

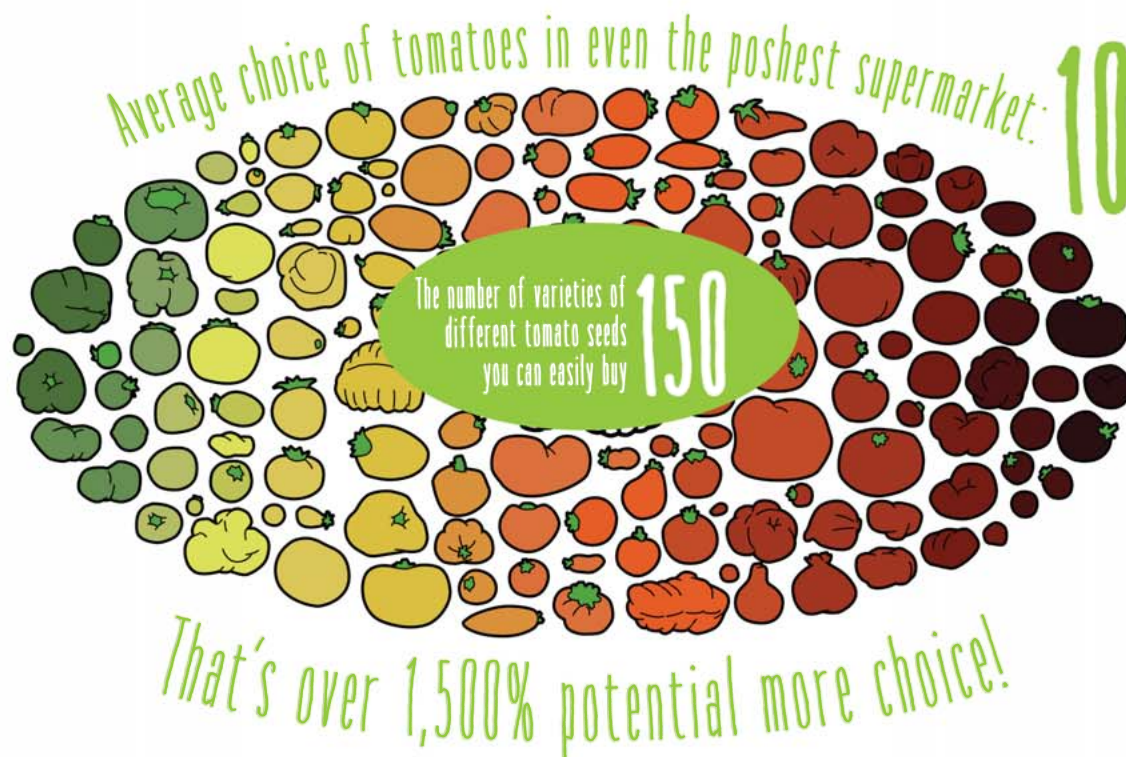
Have you ever heard the word "bijou" used by anyone other than an estate agent? Everyone else says "tiny". Well, in much the same way seed catalogues have their own cryptic code which requires cracking if you are to root out great flavour. As a very rough guide, if you see the words "exhibition variety", they translate as large and watery, as do "huge", "giant" and "mammoth". "Novelty", "ornamental" and "patio" mean they have been bred for looks or small size, not taste. If the best thing about a variety is its taste, I can assure you this will be proudly emblazoned in the top line.

have been rejected by commercial buyers for being – ahem – too red.

Sadly, many seed catalogues insist on promoting the same varieties that are popular in the shops. Trust me, if you set yourself up in competition with the giants growing strawberries and butternut squash, you are unlikely to be convinced by the flavour difference you get.

What you won't see in the book.

For me to grow a crop, it needs to taste so unrecognisably different from shop-bought specimens that the mere promise of it makes me want to get out and dig on a cold winter's day. For this reason you will not see me grow cabbages, sprouts, onions, summer radishes, aubergines, celery, potatoes, cauliflowers, parsnips, cucumbers or sweet peppers, all of which have failed the horticultural acid test that is my backyard. If you love them and have a burning desire to grow them, please be my guest. It's just that I would feel a bit of a fraud recommending them on the merits of their flavour difference alone.



Stress is good

The French, who know more than a little about food, have a wonderful word: *terroir*. This refers to a special set of characteristics such as geology, geography and climate that conspire with a plant's genes to produce its flavour. The same phenomenon was noted by the Chinese for its effect on tea, thousands of years ago. More

recent analysis has shown that genetically identical plants grown in different conditions can differ dramatically in their internal chemistry and therefore in their taste.

Key among these factors is stress. Most of the aromatic compounds, acids, bitters and spicy chemicals responsible for crop flavour are

defence chemicals. Working in ingenious and often unexpected ways, these chemical weapons help plants fight against threats such as insect attack, drought and searing UV light. The more stress a plant is under, the more of these chemicals it will manufacture. Here are just a few examples.

CIS-3-HEXENAL

This gives the grassy-green scent to freshly cut lawn and is a major component in the flavour of ripe tomatoes. It may also help reduce the effects of fatigue and psychological stress. Plants emit it to lure predatory insects that prey on their arch-enemies such as aphids and whitefly.



ALLICIN

If you love the flavour and health benefits of garlic, this is what you have to thank. Garlic develops alliin within seconds at the location of a wound, helping the plant to fight off bacterial and fungal infections.



ALLYL ISOTHIOCYANATE

This is the potent antioxidant that gives rocket, watercress and mustard their peppery kick. Plants produce this as a natural insecticide and antibacterial agent to stave off attack and infections.



METHYL JASMONATE

This is responsible for the floral fragrance of jasmine and oolong tea. Studies suggest this may have anticancer effects. In plants it acts as a chemical distress signal, warning their neighbours that an attack is underway.



More stress equals more flavour – and less work

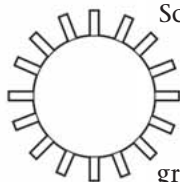
The raising of defence chemicals means these elite botanical athletes not only taste better, but are also more resilient and easy to grow,

giving you maximum flavour for minimum labour. Plants spoiled by lashings of water and feed, by contrast, are effectively lounging by the pool, cocktail in hand. They may be larger and lusher, but

contain way less of the good stuff. The key to growing for flavour is to introduce just enough stress to maximise the production of these chemicals, without damaging their overall health.

Flavour factor 2: sunlight

Pretty much all fruit and vegetable crops will not only grow better, but also produce a measurable increase in flavour when grown in full sun. Plants are effectively living solar panels that capture the sun's energy and use it to make sugars, acids, fats and aromas – basically everything that tastes good. In short, with almost every plant you grow, the more light you can get them under the more intense their flavour will be.

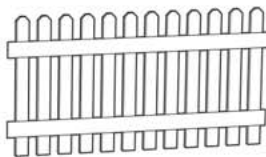


Scientists at the University of Nottingham in England found that doubling the light levels over strawberry plants grown in shade led to a twofold spike in their aroma compounds. Fortunately, even for those without the perfect plot basking in full sunlight unhindered by trees and buildings, there are a few simple ways of giving your plants the maximum amount of light.

As with all things in life, there are downsides to going for the low-hanging fruit. Pruning to create an open, clear canopy will take just a few minutes, allowing more light in to where your crops need it.

Reflect it in

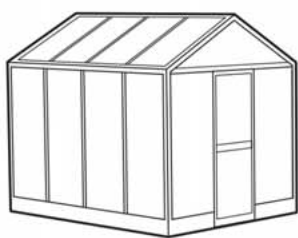
Using a pale-coloured gravel on the paths between your beds, or painting the walls and fences of your plot white, will instantly turn them into giant reflectors. This bounces light onto your plants and can result in a noticeable growth spurt. It will also have the rather convenient side effect that your garden will appear larger and brighter even on the duller days.



Make a trade-off

Most people will (very logically) reserve the sunniest spot in their garden for a seating area, often to

Plants are living solar panels that capture the sun's energy and use it to make sugars, acids, fats and aromas



Ditch the glasshouse

Despite being transparent, glass can filter out as much as 40 per cent of the light available to your plants, particularly if it's dusty. That's potentially a 40 per cent reduction in their sweetness and flavour! Growing hardy plants outdoors or just keeping glasshouse glass scrupulously clean can dramatically improve how much light they receive.

then (very illogically) put up a parasol, trellis or pergola to shade it out. For dedicated flavour growers, swapping these two features around will give you both better-tasting crops and dispense with the need for sun shelters. OK, so your tan may suffer, but your taste buds won't.

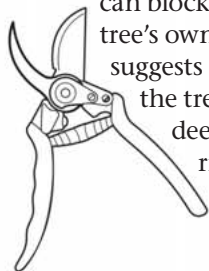


The exception to the rules

While higher light levels will absolutely up the flavour intensity of your fruit and veg, in certain leafy crops it will also boost the chemicals responsible for fiery or pungent tastes, which some people find unpleasant. Rocket, kale and dandelion greens, for example, will be stronger and more bitter if grown in full sun at high summer, but milder and sweeter in light shade.

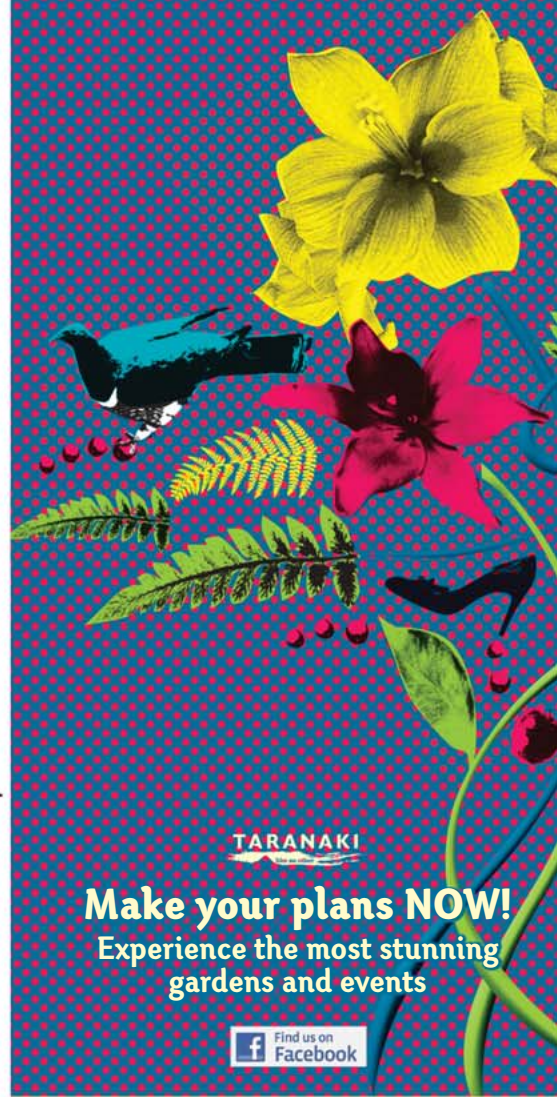
Get scissor happy

Ironically, one of the key factors that can block the light from fruit is the tree's own leaves. In fact, research suggests that apples at the top of the tree can be twice as sweet, deeper in colour and even richer in antioxidants as those on the bottom.



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Colour therapy

Researchers have discovered that it is not just the amount of light, but also its quality that affects plant growth.

In the 1990s, studies at Clemson University in South Carolina revealed that the different wavelengths

reflected off coloured plastic mulches are capable of both upping yield and dramatically improving flavour.



RED

Trials in the US found that tomato plants grown through red plastic mulch produced up to 20 per cent higher yields over those grown with no mulch. Strawberries echoed this, producing more aroma and tasting sweeter. Rolls of red plastic mulch can be bought online, so why not and see if it works for you?



GREEN

Basil grown over green surfaces in the Clemson University trials produced significantly higher concentrations of aroma and phytonutrient compounds. Simply painting your glasshouse shelf green and popping pots on top of this just might improve their flavour in the same way.



SILVER

US studies in the 1970s showed that peppers grown over aluminium foil produced 85 per cent more fruit, with a dramatically lower incidence of aphid damage, due to the increase in the amount of light the plants received. To mimic this effect, line your glasshouse shelves with a layer of kitchen foil.



BLACK

Growing melons through black plastic mulch helps heat their roots. Trials show this can cause their fruits to ripen 3-4 weeks earlier and produce higher yields. I prefer to use a mulch of black biochar, a byproduct of charcoal manufacture that is easier to lay and improves soil texture.

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Australia's premier garden event just keeps growing. The famous Toowoomba Carnival of Flowers is a 10-day spectacular just an hour-and-a-half scenic drive from Brisbane and features tours of some of Australia's finest award-winning gardens and parks, and a Food and Wine Festival. A highlight is the Grand Floral Parade with more than 100,000 people lining the streets of Toowoomba.

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Flavour factor 3: watering

Water is necessary for all plant life. However, excessive irrigation is a sure-fire route to less tasty crops. When absorbed through the roots and pumped into the cells of leaves and fruits, water dilutes the concentrations of sugars, vitamins and aroma chemicals. A dubious reward after hours of battling with the hose.

In fact, most fruit and veg crops hail from Mediterranean climates and will tolerate dry conditions far more readily than you might imagine. Cutting down on the water has frequently been demonstrated to improve crop flavour and nutrient content without denting yield. The sweetness of cherries, grapes, pears and peaches, as well as the sugar content, Vitamin C and antioxidant levels of apples and even the spiciness of chillies, have all been recorded as rising as watering regimes are lowered.

This reduction in irrigation also prevents rampant leaf growth, which can divert resources away from the fruit and shade out the sunlight. Some Californian growers of premium tomatoes will stop irrigation altogether after the plants are established. This practice, known as dry farming, creates smaller plants and meagre yields, but can send the concentration of flavour chemicals sky-rocketing. Even in root crops like beetroot and carrots, lower irrigation can cause sugar content to rise, with nutritious polyphenols increasing by up to 86 per cent.

Encouraging these tougher, more resilient plants with deeper root systems does of course mean that, if watering is interrupted for whatever reason, the rugged specimens will often sail through unhampered.

For fruit crops the most crucial time to cut down watering is in the days leading up to harvest: just one week of slight drought stress can produce an almost magical transformation in flavour.

In leaf crops my advice would be the opposite, with greens being noticeably smaller and often spicier or more bitter. If you like your rocket to taste really fiery, skimp on the water, but if you prefer it milder get out there and spoil it with the hose. This added water will also make your greens more tender and succulent, not tough and fibre-filled. ❀

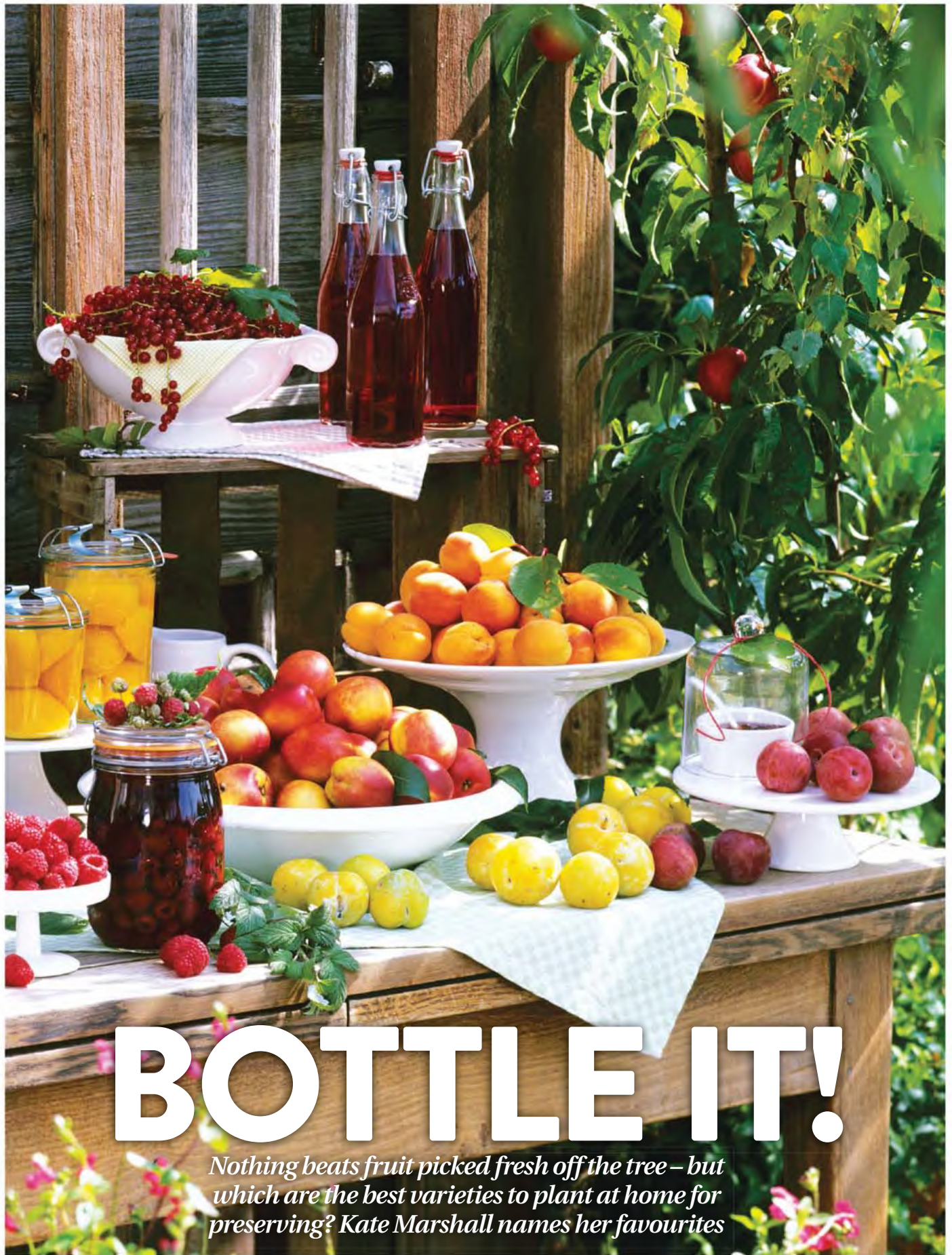
In root crops
such as beetroot
& carrot, lower
irrigation can
boost sugar
& antioxidant
content by
up to 86%



Extract from
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BOTTLE IT!

Nothing beats fruit picked fresh off the tree – but which are the best varieties to plant at home for preserving? Kate Marshall names her favourites



'Sweet Perfection' is a new leaf curl-resistant peach variety that is freestone, with an almost fuzzless skin and golden flesh that bottles well

Fruit trees can be planted almost any time of the year, but winter is when garden centres and nurseries have the best range of varieties. Most fruit trees are grown in field nurseries, and are lifted out of the ground using special machinery (in large nurseries) or by spade (in smaller ones) when the trees have dropped their leaves and are dormant.

When considering a home orchard, try to choose varieties and fruit types that will ensure a harvest throughout the year, provide any necessary cross pollination, and produce enough fruit to eat fresh or preserve to enjoy through the winter months when there are few fruits hanging for harvest.



The first pear for harvesting in late summer is 'Williams' Bon Crétien' – also known as the Bartlett pear – and is by far the best pear variety for bottling. (Wattie's use it for its canned pears.) 'Williams' Bon Crétien' trees produce large, pale green fruit, with firm white flesh that is sweet, juicy and full of flavour. The pears are not only good for bottling, but they also make excellent dried pear crisps.

Best for jam

Almost any fruit can be boiled up for jam. My favourites are raspberries, apricots, plums and boysenberries. Jam-making is quick and virtually foolproof. Ripe fruit are preferable for their flavour and ease of setting.

Overripe fruit has lower levels of

Best for bottling

The classic method of preserving is to store slices of cooked fruit in a sugar syrup, but some varieties are better suited than others. Select fruit with a balance of sweet and acid flavours, which is ripe but still firm-fleshed. Soft fruit will turn to mush once cooked, and preserving will not improve the flavour of green fruit.

Stonefruit have a short season and don't keep well fresh, so are one of the most popular fruits to bottle. Around Christmas, the first plum and apricot varieties are ready for harvest. 'Moorpark' and 'Trevatt' are the best apricot varieties for preserving, as the fruit has a rich colour and flavour, separating easily from the stone. Later in the season 'Cluthagold' has an intense flavour so is perfect for eating fresh and preserving what is left.

The best plum varieties for bottling are 'Black Doris', the bright red 'Billington', 'Elephant Heart' (freestone) and the late-season 'Omega'. When separating the flesh from clingstone varieties, try to handle it as gently as possible.

Only firm-fleshed peaches should be used for bottling, such as 'Red Haven', the red-flesh variety 'Blackboy', the classic 'Golden Queen' or the earlier-ripening 'Golden Haze'. 'Orion' is a freestone peach that was found as a seedling in Kumeu and grows well in warmer regions. The fruit is very early ripening so should be harvested before humidity brings on the death of stonefruit: brown rot. 'Sweet Perfection' is a new leaf curl-resistant variety that is also freestone, with an almost fuzzless skin and golden flesh that bottles well.

acid and pectin, so will need added pectin. One option is to use Chelsea Jam Setting Sugar, which has pectin mixed in – nice and easy. Under-ripe fruit has less juice and flavour, but it is high in pectin so can be combined with ripe or overripe fruit. For stonefruit jams, leave the stones in while boiling (just remember to scoop them out before pouring into jars) to release the pectin out of the stone. Apples are high in pectin too, so can be included in jams to help with setting and will add a nice texture.

Plum jam is one of my favourites. I find the best varieties are 'Billington' (for red jam), 'Elephant Heart', 'Black Doris', 'Omega' and 'Satsuma' (for dark purple jam). These plum varieties are also great for spicy sauce.

Perhaps because of New Zealand's British heritage, greengages and damsons have an almost cult following here. Damson plums are small, blueish-purple skinned and need to be fully ripened on the tree, otherwise the fruit is extremely sour. Even fully ripe, the fruit is quite tart and high in pectin, which means damsons are perfect for jams (not to mention jellies, sauces, pickles and tipples like damson gin). Greengage plums are small with greenish-yellow skin and translucent flesh, and are fantastic made into jam or stewed. If you have room for only one tree, try 'Reine Claude de Bavay' as it's the only self-fertile greengage type.

Berries have such a short season in summer that it's always a good idea to preserve the excess production. The fruit is easy to throw in the freezer in bulk to make into jam at a later date.

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Raspberries can yield around 4kg per plant – that's a lot of smoothies, tarts and pavlova toppings. Making raspberry jam is almost a necessity! Plant summer-fruiting raspberries like 'Waiau' and 'Aspiring' along with autumn-fruiting types like 'Heritage' to spread your harvest season from Christmas until April.

Some of the easiest bramble berries to grow are boysenberries and hybrid berries (a cross of boysenberries and loganberries). Their soft berries don't store well when fully ripe, so a good deal of fruit is naturally destined for jam making. Plant the boysenberry varieties 'Brulee', 'Tasman' or 'Mapua' to harvest in December, and the hybrid berries 'Berry Delight' and 'Thornless Jewel', from Incredible Edibles, which are ready for eating from December into January.

There are few better uses for blackcurrants than making jam. The berries are very juicy and easy to over boil (making a very thick jam – speaking from my first blackcurrant jam-making experience) so use the wrinkle test on a cold plate to check setting. The most commonly available variety for home gardeners is 'Magnus', which is still grown in commercial plantations – an indication of its enduring high quality and productivity.

Best for freezing (with no added sugar)

Most methods of preserving fruit entail the use of lots of sugar. Freezing, however, is a quick and easy way to store fruit without

needing sugar for preservation. If you simply don't have time to make jam when

the fruit is ready, just freeze the fruit and make the jam later. This can be especially helpful in the heat of summer when standing over a hot pot while stirring jam is the last thing on your mind.

Fruit that doesn't brown when exposed to air, such as cherries, plums, grapes and all berries, are best frozen in a single layer on a baking tray, then packed into freezer bags for free flow use. This is an ideal way to provide a handful for smoothies and cereal toppings.

Light-coloured fleshed fruit such as apples, peaches and apricots should be stewed first before freezing in freezer bags or containers. Remember that the liquid will expand by around 10 per cent once frozen due to its high water content. Some apple varieties cook to a lovely puffy purée – stew these heritage varieties for winter apple crumbles: 'Monty's Surprise', 'Bramley Seedling', 'Peasgood Nonsuch', 'Sturmer Pippin' and 'Granny Smith'.

Best for marmalade

Any zesty citrus can be used to make marmalade, but the most delicious spread is made from Seville bitter oranges – the traditional ingredient for marmalade. 'Seville' oranges are of Spanish origin, so this variety performs best in warm spots protected from frost. The winter-ripening fruits can also be used in liqueurs for boozy preserving. ❀

WIN AN ORCHARD!



Waimea Nurseries is giving away two orchards of fruit trees for home preservers, each including apples 'Monty's Surprise' and 'Bramley's Seedling'; boysenberry 'Tasman'; plums 'Billington', 'Satsuma' and 'Damson' and blackcurrant 'Magnus'. To enter, visit nzgardener.co.nz or write your details on the back of an envelope and send to Orchard Giveaway, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. Entries open on June 30 and close on July 26.

SOUP KITCHEN

Make hearty soups from homegrown crops with these classic recipes from loved Kiwi food writer Digby Laws

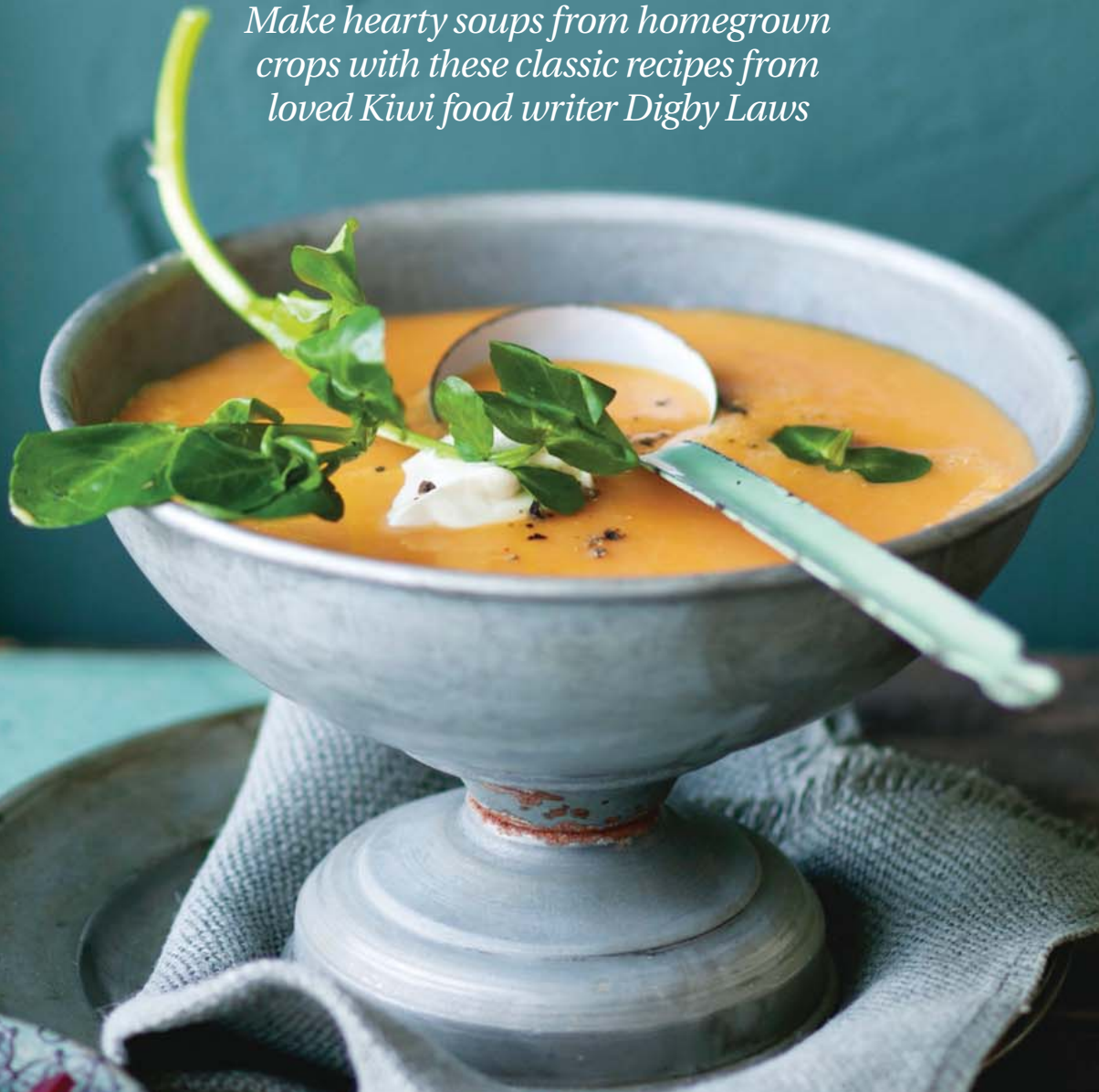


PHOTO: WOLFGANG SCHARDT/JALAG-SYNDICATION/STOCKFOOD/PNZ

The King's Pumpkin Soup
(recipe overleaf)

BORSCH

Ingredients • 2kg fresh beef brisket, cut into chunks • ½ small cabbage, chopped • 1 onion, chopped • 3 carrots, cut into matchsticks • 1 parsnip, cut into matchsticks • 3 cooked beetroot, cut into matchsticks • the water in which the beetroot were cooked • salt and freshly ground black pepper • 2 bay leaves • 1 clove garlic, crushed • 1 cup tomato purée • 3 potatoes, cubed

Put the meat with bones in a large saucepan, cover with water and boil 1 hour. Allow to cool. Strain the liquid through a sieve, remove the skin and bone from the meat and cut into pieces. Ideally the liquid should be refrigerated to remove the fat. Return meat and liquid to the saucepan and add the prepared cabbage, onion, carrots, parsnip and beetroot, the beetroot water, salt and pepper, bay leaves and garlic. Simmer for 1 hour. Add the tomato purée and potatoes, adjust the seasoning and simmer another ½ hour. Garnish each bowl with a teaspoon of sour cream. Serves 12.

THE KING'S PUMPKIN SOUP

Ingredients • 1kg pumpkin • 4½ cups chicken stock • 1 medium onion, chopped • 6 spring onions, chopped • 4 tomatoes, peeled and chopped • 300ml cream • juice of 1 lemon • 1 teaspoon curry powder • 1 teaspoon brown sugar • salt and black pepper • cream or sour cream to garnish • chopped chives or herb of your choice to garnish

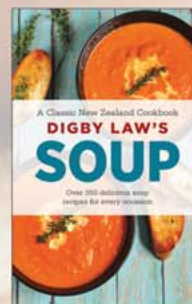
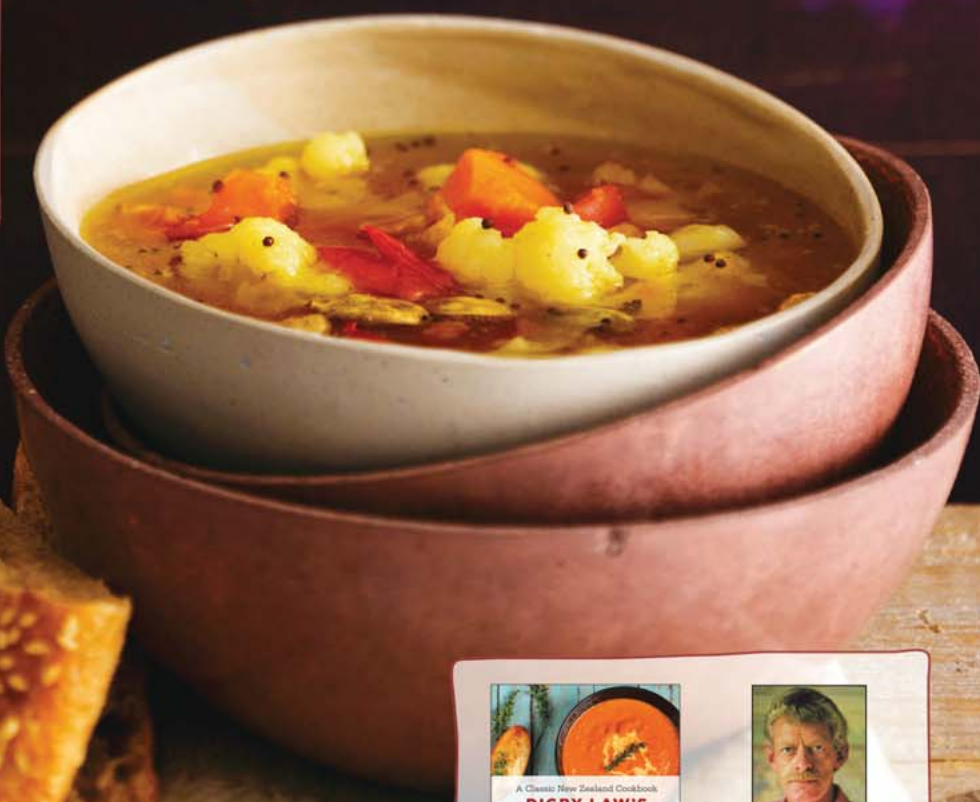
Simmer the pumpkin, stock, onion, spring onion and tomatoes until tender. Blend until smooth, and return purée to saucepan. Add the cream, lemon juice, curry powder and brown sugar, and season to taste with salt and freshly ground black pepper. Reheat to blend but do not boil. Serve either hot or chilled, with a blob of whipped cream or sour cream and a sprinkling of herbs in each bowl. Accompany with thin slices of rye bread or perhaps Indian chapattis. Serves 8.



OLD FASHIONED VEGETABLE SOUP

Thick, hearty and nourishing, and a winter standby for almost every home. In a large saucepan put a lump of shin of beef and a few bacon, ham or brisket bones. Cover well with water and add several chopped onions, chopped celery, herbs (thyme, parsley, bay leaf, for instance), and some dried beans, lentils or barley. Bring to the boil, cover and simmer for several hours or until meat is falling off the bones. Remove bones, fat and gristle and return soup to the stove. Now add all sorts of vegetables, old gravies and vegetable waters, and any suitable bits and pieces lurking in the refrigerator. Grated carrot, parsnip, turnip, finely diced beetroot, kumara, pumpkin or potato, chopped silverbeet, spinach, cauliflower flowerets, a few peeled and chopped tomatoes, any cold, leftover vegetables can all be added towards the end of cooking. Season well with salt and pepper. This sort of soup will keep on keeping on if you continually add suitable leftovers to the leftover soup.

Very few soups could be made without vegetables – most contain at least one of the onion family for flavouring. A vegetable can taste quite different in soup depending on whether it is in big chunks, finely chopped or puréed



Extracted with permission from
Digby Law's Soup

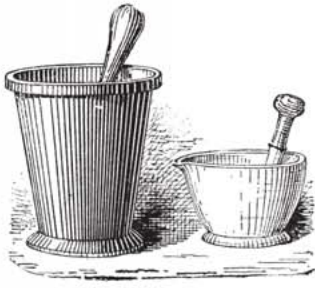
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RRP, available where all good books are sold. We have three copies to give away. To enter, write your contact details on the back of an envelope and mail to Soup, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. Or visit nzgardener.co.nz to enter online. Entries close July 26, 2015.

Flax Linum usitatissimum

Ancient wonders

The use of herbs for medicinal purposes can be traced back thousands of years. Jane Wrigglesworth reveals five plants used by healers long ago



In his scientific treatise The Natural History, Pliny the Elder (AD23-79) described milk thistle as being 'excellent for carrying off bile'

The earliest recorded medicinal use of herbs is a Sumerian clay slab from Nagpur, India, believed to be 5000 years old. It has 12 recipes for remedies and named more than 250 plants.

Predating written history, seeds likely used for herbal medicine and pollen from flowering herbs have been found at ancient burial sites. Pollen from eight plant species, including yarrow, knapweed, groundsel, grape hyacinth, mallows and ephedra, were found at the Neanderthal burial site Shanidar IV in northern Iraq, which dates around 60,000BC. The anthropologist Ralph Solecki unearthed the remains, and wrote in 1975: "One may speculate that Shanidar IV was not only a very important man, a leader, but may also have been a kind of medicine man or shaman in his group."

Herbs were used in ancient times for rituals, currency, food, perfume and, of course, medicine. Milk thistle, garlic, turmeric, cumin, aloe, anise, balm, cassia, cinnamon and hyssop were all used for medicinal and other purposes, and still are today.

Take milk thistle (*Silybum marianum*): as far back as 2000 years ago, it was a treatment for liver disorders. In his book *The Natural History* Pliny the Elder (AD23-79) described milk thistle as being "excellent for carrying off bile". The 16th century British herbalist John Gerard prescribed it to "expel melancholy", which physicians at the time considered a liver complaint.

Herbs were important to the ancients. They were gathered wild, bought at markets or grown in their own gardens. They were eaten, imbibed and applied to the skin to treat various ailments. Many herbs were used in remedies but the five listed here were standouts.



Frankincense

Most commonly known as an ingredient for incense, frankincense is an aromatic resin that derives from trees of the *Boswellia* family. Along with gold and myrrh, it was named in the Bible as one of the Wise Men's gifts to the baby Jesus. Traded in the Middle East and North Africa for over 5000 years, it was burned in religious ceremonies and was used in perfumes and insect repellents, and in salves and solutions to treat everything from indigestion to leprosy. It was also a key ingredient in the embalming process.

Frankincense has antiseptic, anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties so it's well suited to numerous ailments, something the ancients were well aware of. It is obtained by slashing the bark, a process called striping. The resin that oozes out is allowed to harden before it's scraped off the trunk. It may then be used in its dried form or steam distilled to yield essential oils.

It is the essential oil that we have access to here in New Zealand. In particular, it's used to treat stress and depression, as it has a calming effect

on the mind. I love it in spicy perfumes – it has a woody aroma with a piney-lemon smell with a hint of pepper. It's good in citrus perfumes as well, as it helps to extend the life of citrus. The anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties of frankincense are used today in a topical salve to alleviate the symptoms of arthritis.

Flax

Not to be confused with our native phormium, *Linum usitatissimum* is an annual herb that grows a metre high and bears small sky-blue flowers. It's one of the oldest known crop plants, grown for its fibre, which is used to make linen, and for its seeds, from which flaxseed or linseed oil derives.

In ancient times the seeds were used as a demulcent (to relieve pain and inflammation of the membrane), to soothe burns or inflamed skin, and as a laxative. Today both the seeds and its oil are still widely used in herbal medicine. They're rich in essential fatty acids, and are useful for addressing a variety of inflammatory disorders and to protect against heart and circulation problems.

The plant's natural fibres were used to make the linen that wrapped the mummies of ancient Egypt dating back to at least 5000BC. And they're still used in linen production today. The species has been developed as two strains: a taller one known as long-stalked flax, or linen flax, which is grown for its fibre (it gives few seeds), and a shorter one, called crown flax, common blue flax, or linseed, which is grown for its flowers and seed. Seeds for both strains are sown in spring. For use in linen, it takes 70-90 days for the plant to grow from seed to fibre production. Seeds for eating are harvested in late summer. Sow directly in a sunny position in well-drained soil.



Frankincense



Myrrh



Anise



Garlic

Myrrh

Commiphora myrrha, or

Commiphora molmol, was one of the earliest plants to be put to medicinal use. Sumerian texts around 1700BC describe several remedies containing myrrh. It's also mentioned in the ancient Egyptian medical text *Ebers Papyrus* from 1550BC.

Like frankincense, the aromatic resin is used, obtained by the same slashing method. It was employed as an incense and a perfume, and was valued in medicine for its antiseptic, anti-inflammatory, analgesic and fever-reducing properties, and still is today. In Biblical times it was a part of the anointing oils used in the Tabernacle to purify the dead.

The pieces of resin break easily and can be used in a tincture or steam distilled to yield essential oils. It can be applied directly to a mouth ulcer or infected gum, or 1 teaspoon diluted in water and used as a mouthwash. Use up to 3 times daily.

Garlic is said to foster love and remove jealousy. It boosts blood flow to the penis by increasing nitric-oxide

Anise

In Biblical times, anise (*Pimpinella anisum*) was used to pay taxes and in offerings. The Ancient Egyptians and Ancient Greeks cultivated it for its diuretic and digestive properties, as well as to relieve pain and ease thirst. Today, anise is used to reduce gut spasms, diminish coughing and help with asthma and bronchitis. Chomp on the seeds for a breath freshener.

An annual herb, anise grows 30-45cm high and produces slender stems with umbels of white flowers. The seeds are harvested in autumn. Dry them before storing in an airtight container. To grow your own, sow seed in spring in well-drained, rich soil in sun or light shade. To treat digestive problems and coughs, grind ½ teaspoon of dried anise seeds to release the essential oil. Infuse in 1 cup of freshly boiled water for 5 minutes, then strain. Drink 2-3 cups a day.

Garlic

Ezra, the Jewish scribe and priest, ordained 10 laws: including that the law (God's law) be read on Sabbath; that the law be read on Mondays and Thursdays; that courts be held on Mondays and Thursdays; that clothes be washed on Thursdays; and that garlic be eaten on Fridays!

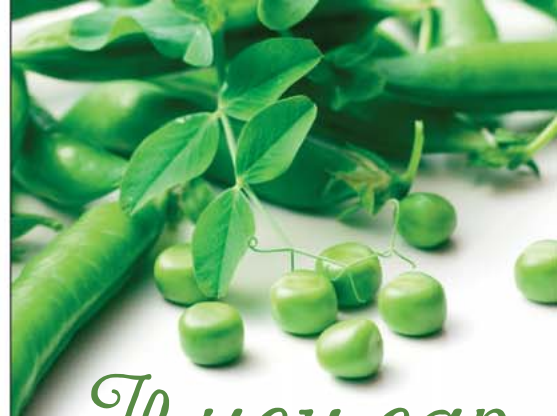
Garlic had an important role in the ancient world. Its five properties were said to be this: it satiates; it keeps the body warm; it brightens the face; it increases semen; and it kills parasites in the bowels. It was also said to foster love and remove jealousy. Why eat garlic on a Friday? Because it was customary to have marital relations on a Friday... and garlic was thought to foster love and increase semen.

Garlic does, in fact, appear to help with virility. It boosts blood flow to the penis by increasing nitric-oxide production and relaxing blood vessels. Without nitric oxide, erections are impossible.

The Egyptians consumed raw garlic and onions for increased strength and productivity, for general malaise, to treat circulatory ailments and parasitic worms. The ancient Greeks also consumed garlic to increase strength and courage, and for pulmonary issues. Fresh garlic was mashed and macerated in a mixture of vinegar and water and used as a rinse for sore throats and toothaches.

Today, garlic is used to treat heart disease and high cholesterol, to lower high blood pressure, for infections (it has antimicrobial actions), to boost the immune system, and to treat digestive and respiratory problems, among other things.

The tradition is to plant on the shortest day and harvest on the longest, but really plant cloves in a sunny spot in well-drained soil in autumn or winter. Each clove will form a bulb ready to harvest mid to late summer, or early autumn. ❀



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GET BZZZY

Our furry pollinating friends need all the help they can get in the nesting season. So why not make them a bumblebee box?



Fertilised queens are really the only life stage that exists in winter, given that all the workers and drones have kicked the cyclical bucket by autumn

Just as it seems the whole land is resting for the winter, we should be turning our thoughts to how best to care for the humble bumblebee. These lovely, hairy insects are no stranger to many of our gardens, and their essential role in pollinating our orchards and crops means we should do everything in our power to entice them into our gardens with clever planting and a great nesting site.

But before we even consider building a site – or a nest, for that matter – it pays to be conversant with the insect's life cycle in both space and time. The middle of winter, when everybody is more or less dormant, is paradoxically a good time to start the familiarisation.

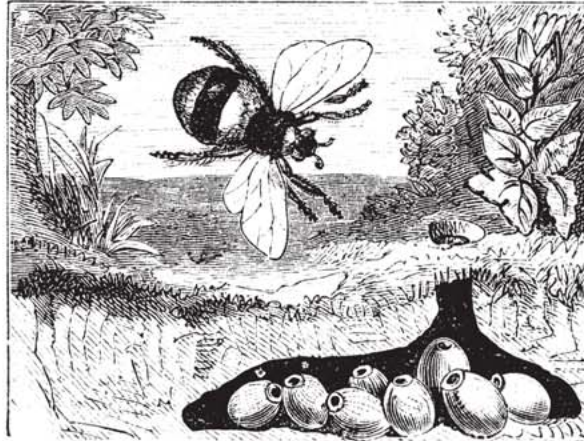
Fertilised queens are those huge, bumbling flying machines we so love and cherish. They are really the only life stage that exists in winter, given that all the (usually smaller) workers and drones (males) have kicked the cyclical bucket by autumn.

These females hide themselves under leaf litter, in old mouse holes, or simply under compost in open bins. Anywhere there's a cosy cavity, away from the most severe frosts will do. Indeed, on the warmer winter's days a queen may be seen flying about, gathering nectar or pollen from the odd flower in the garden. These remarkable creatures have the ability to warm up their muscles to 35°C, which allows them to travel to all the nutritious products on offer, and reach a resource that few other insects can access at this time of the year.

When the first hint of spring is in the air, the queen goes on the lookout for a more permanent position for the beginnings of her nest. Once again, it has to be in a floriferous area, with plenty of shelter and preferably easily accessible by air.

A hole at the base of a tree would do nicely; a small gap in between a few stacked bricks or a pile of jute bags would also be really cool real estate. As long as there's no overheating by direct sunshine in summer, no flooding during downpours or excess shade, frost or cold wind, a bumblebee queen will be happy.

The small nest area will be provisioned with a "honey pot" created from wax, which is extruded from between her abdominal body segments. Collected pollen is then mixed with the nectar within that pot and sculpted into



pollen balls, which form the larder for the queen's first batch of larvae. The creation of these larval foods is why it's so important to have early spring-flowering plant species in your garden.

As soon as the first offspring (which become the workers) have dried their wings, the queen goes into semi-retirement, concentrating mostly on egg-laying and light domestic duties, I suppose. The workers will then set about gathering the fodder

and directing the brooding efforts around the nest.

That nest will grow week by week and the numbers of inhabitants increase accordingly. Isn't it lovely to see the buzzing traffic in your garden?

To encourage these insects to set up shop, you can easily create a wooden bumblebee nest box. Organic gardening expert Steve Wratten suggests making one about 30cm² from 4mm untreated plywood. It should have wooden runners to keep the base dry and off the ground, and a waterproof cover, painted a pale colour to prevent overheating. Hammer in four nails 2cm above the base, then fit stiff plastic sheeting with holes pushed through to provide little bee "dunnies". Top this plastic with raw materials such as carpet underfelt or a double layer of old woollen clothing or blankets to create a nice fluffy nest.

Whatever design you use, here are some more elements you need to consider. The main brood chamber should be about 25 x 25 x 25cm in size; with a smaller vestibule behind the front door. This is where bees will likely defecate after their flight, before they enter the actual nest, and greatly helps with nest hygiene. Ideally the entrance should be a 2.5cm hole, drilled just above the floor level. The connection between vestibule and main brood chamber is perhaps 4cm above floor level. Build the box with a removable roof for the occasional, careful inspection of the nest and also to allow thorough cleaning during the winter months.

Make the front entrance hole stand out by painting it a different colour; alternatively, insert a 2.5cm wide tube in the nest box opening so that any bumblebee can see the entrance from a good distance. Sowing phacelia regularly nearby from spring to autumn will provide an excellent source of pollen and nectar and encourage queen bees to colonise their new man-made home. ❀

PLANTER TABLE

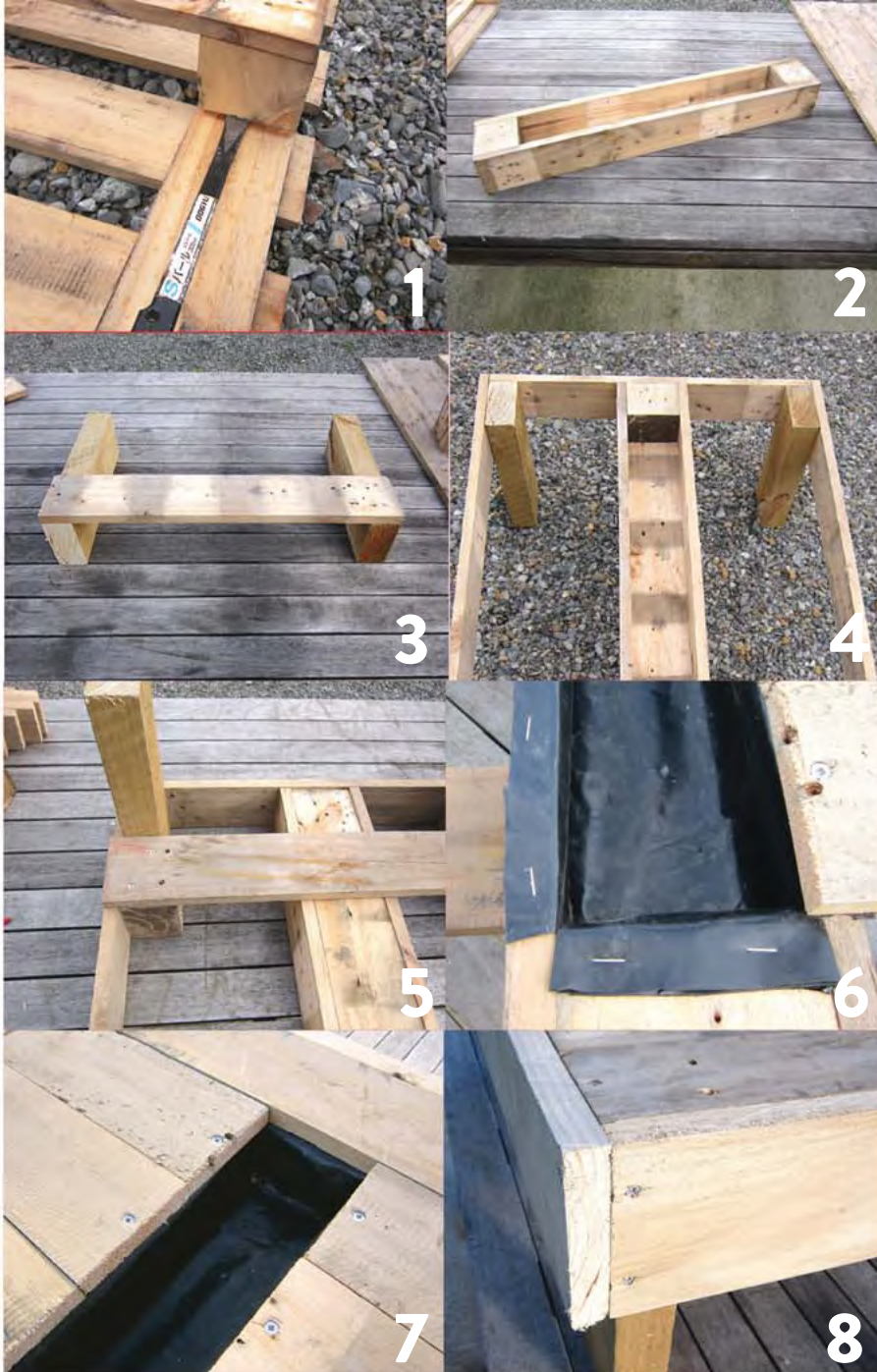
Rose Hughes shows how to create a clever space for succulents and edibles in your outdoor entertaining area

MATERIALS

You will need: 1 x pallet • 4m of 150mm x 25mm rough sawn pine • 1.5m of 100mm x 50mm rough sawn pine • Galvanised screws 8g x 40mm • Crowbar (optional) • Hammer • Screwdriver • Drop saw • Skilsaw • Black polythene • Staple gun

Cutting list: **Planter box** 3 x pallet panels at 840mm & 2 x pallet blocks • **Legs** 4 x 320mm of 100mm x 50mm pine • **Internal edging** 2 x 870mm & 2 x 600mm of pallet panels • **Base** 6 pallet blocks and 3 x pallet panels at 640mm • **Top** 14 x 270mm, 2 x 640mm from pallet panels • **Outer edging** 2 x 920mm, 2 x 640mm from 150mm x 25mm rough sawn pine • **COST \$30**

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1 These instructions are based on a pallet with approx 95mm x 15mm boards. Start by dismantling the pallet.

2 Assemble the planter box. Slice a 15mm piece off each pallet block, attach two of the sides and the base as shown in the image above. Add additional screws to attach the sides to the base.

3 Attach a leg at each end of the side panels. Attach front and back panels to the legs to form a rectangle.

4 With the top of the table facing downwards, centre the planter box and attach at each end.

5 Attach a pallet block next to each leg and one centred along the front and back panels. Attach a cross brace cut to length to each.

6 Turn the table over. Line the planter slot with polythene, staple in place and add drainage holes. (Though be aware this may cause the wood to rot.)

7 Attach the top panels as shown.

8 Trim 20mm off the long edge of the 150mm outer edging timber with the Skilsaw. Fit and screw into place. Sand and paint. I used Resene 'Woodsman Whitewash'. Plant up and enjoy!



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OUR PANEL THIS MONTH:
Dr Jim Walker and Midge Munro

Ask an expert

FRUIT & VEGE GROWING ADVICE THIS MONTH

Q **CARROT TIPS**
My carrots have stumpy, divided roots and horrible insect holes. Please give me some tips to help me grow a decent crop of carrots.
SARAH HANSEN, AUCKLAND

A Give carrots the best start in life by preparing the bed carefully. Add mature compost (plus some coarse sand if you have heavy clay soil) and fork it in well until the soil is light and

friable. Any fresh manure, stones or hard clumps of clay will cause the carrot roots to fork and twist like mandrake roots. You could even go the extra mile and sieve the soil to make sure there are no lumpy bits.

Sow the seeds directly where they are to grow; transplanting seedlings can also cause the roots to fork. To reduce the work of thinning later, sow 2-3cm apart, in shallow furrows 20-30cm apart or in a grid pattern around 5-6cm apart for a small patch. Cover with seed raising mix. Keep the surface damp until the seeds germinate in two to three weeks. Thin to 5cm apart when leaves are 15cm high. Eat the thinnings raw or toss whole into a stir fry.

The holes are caused by the larvae of the carrot rust fly which lays its eggs near host plants in spring. The adults fly close to the ground so a barrier of taller plants or windbreak cloth can deflect them, or use fine mesh to cover the crop. Planting garlic, onions or marigolds nearby is said to mask the smell of carrots from the flies. Mulch or earth up soil to cover the roots to reduce egg laying sites. Practise good hygiene by rotating crops and remove infected material.

Good luck next season! A crunchy carrot straight from the garden is hard to beat.
Barbara Smith



Q **LEAF MUNCHERS**
I spotted these (pictured) on a leaf of my apple tree.

Can you please tell me what they are and what I should do about them?

TREVOR LURCOOK, WARKWORTH

A Dr Jim Walker, from NZ Institute for Plant & Food Research, identified them as the larvae of a Noctuid moth (*Graphania spp.*). He describes the adult as a stout, dull grey moth and says the larvae are usually found in pasture grasses and weeds.

"A raft of eggs is laid on leaves in spring, hence the highly aggregated damage done by newly hatched neonate larvae," he says.

"Leaf feeding by young larvae often occurs on apple foliage and sometimes fruit, during late spring and early summer. As larger larvae they usually drop to the ground and feed on weeds."

Try Yates Nature's Way Caterpillar Killer, with naturally occurring Btk bacteria, which controls many leaf-eating caterpillars but does not affect birds or mammals.
Barbara Smith





Q CLUB ROOT
We grew broccoli in our new garden. They obviously didn't perform well so I pulled them out and discovered those strange knobs on the roots. What causes this growth and what can I do to prevent it next time?
 CORNELIA HOLTEN, AKAROA

A Unfortunately, these have a serious fungal disease called club root, which attacks brassica family members such as broccoli, cabbage and kale.

The signs above ground are stunted growth and wilted leaves. Below ground, spores of the soil-borne fungus *Plasmodiophora brassicae* invade the roots, causing abnormal tissue growth. Spores are released back into the soil, where they can remain viable for 10 years or more, and can be moved by wind, water or transfer of soil, so new gardens can be infected.

It's a difficult disease to control but there are some ways to fight back. Damp acid soils favour the fungus so adding lime to raise the pH can help. Improve the drainage by adding compost or try a raised bed if the soil is heavy. Rotating crops every season helps prevent a build up of spores. (Brassicas shouldn't be grown in the same place for at least three or four years.) Watch out for weedy brassicas like wild cress which also harbours the fungus and don't use mustard as a cover crop as it's a relative too.

Next season grow broccoli elsewhere and plant peas, potatoes, carrots or beans in the problem spot.
Barbara Smith



Q BIG AVOCADO
I bought this insanely huge avocado from the Papamoa Markets. The skin does not turn black when ripe. Although it's slightly bitter near the skin, the flavour is very good. Does anyone have any idea what it is?
 KERRI ANNE FRASER, PAPAMOA

A Thank you for coming to the grower organisation, New Zealand Avocado, to identify this avocado. At first we thought 'Gwen' or 'Hashimoto'. Then we sent the image to David Grey, son of Len Grey, the first commercial avocado grower in New Zealand. David identified it as an 'Anaheim'.

There are over 500 varieties of avocado in the world. 'Hass' is the dominant commercial variety globally and is the main variety grown in here. Green-skinned 'Fuerte' and round 'Reed' are also available in good quantities. 'Gem', 'Carmen' and 'Maluma' are new Hass-like varieties that have been trialled by the industry.

All avocados that you see for sale in New Zealand are grown here. They are the world's most nutritionally complete fruit – delicious at any time of day.

New Zealand Avocado's research and development work includes a new cultivar programme that assesses new varieties and their suitability for local conditions. We also promote the health and culinary benefits of avocados to consumers in New Zealand and in our export markets.

Midge Munro, New Zealand Avocado



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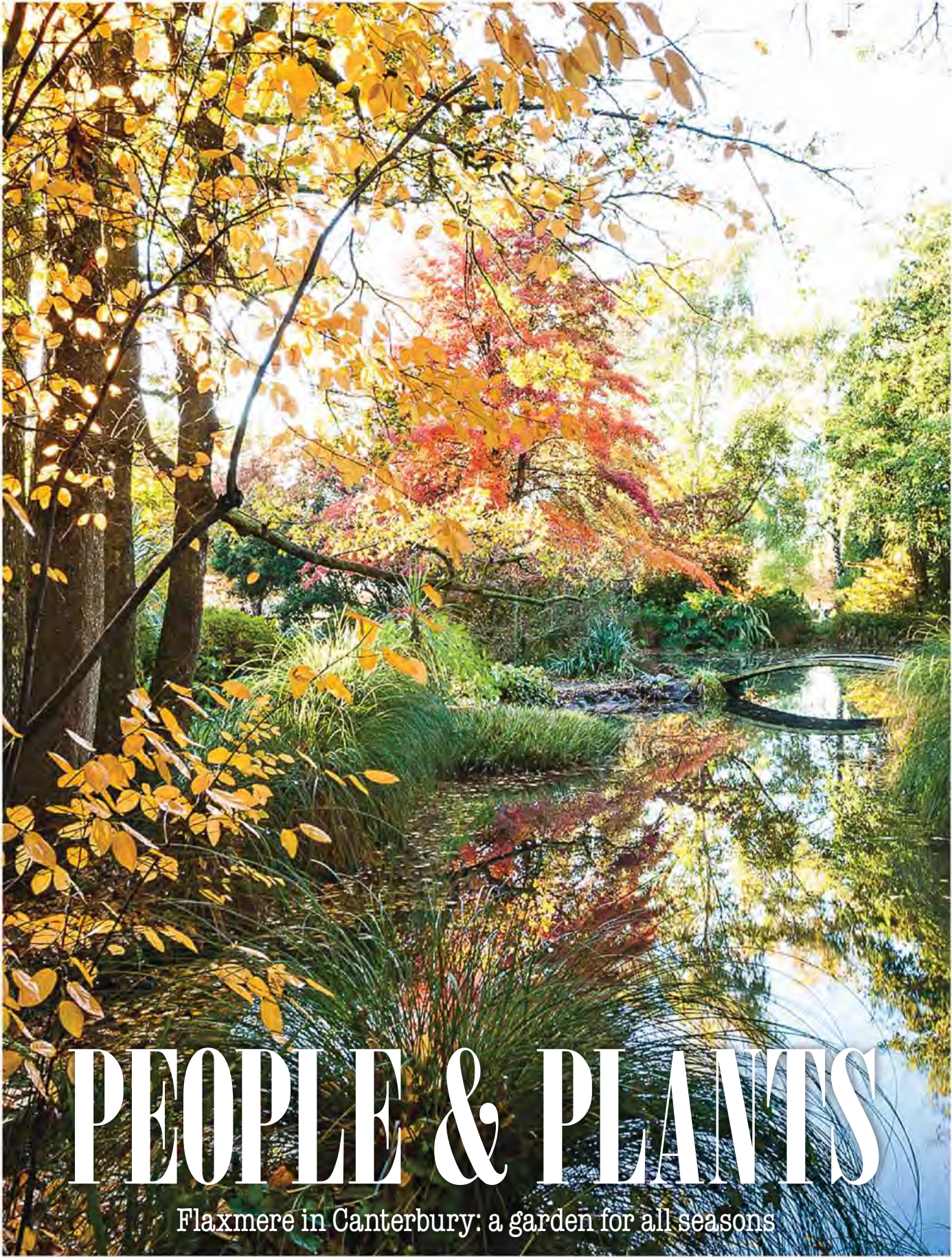
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PEOPLE & PLANTS

Flaxmere in Canterbury: a garden for all seasons

VINTAGE FOOD TINS

I find vintage food tins and flour sifters – who sifts flour any more? – almost as irresistible as quirky cacti and succulents, hence my decision to combine both collections on the same windowsill.

In most cases, I paid more for the old tins than the plants in them, so it did feel reckless to immediately hammer holes in the bottoms of the tins (destroying their resale value) but it's vital for drainage.

You can still pick up old tins cheaply on Trade Me or at car boot sales, especially if they are missing their lids or a bit rusty.

My best find? An original Edmonds Baking Powder tin in mint condition. I nicked it from my Mum's pantry. She's had the same tin (refilled many a time) since she was married 43 years ago; now she has a Tupperware container!



20 CACTI & SUCCULENTS

FOR COLLECTORS

As our backyards shrink and interior designers look for nifty ways to “greenscape” apartments, cacti and succulents are making a comeback. Lynda Hallinan shares 20 favourite species from her expanding collection

PHOTOS: SALLY TAGG/FOGGYDALE FARM

The magpie instinct strikes in mysterious ways. Who doesn't know someone who collects something – be it royal souvenir teaspoons, ceramic Crown Lynn swans, old stamps, eyewateringly expensive designer shoes or every species of carnivorous cephalotus? (Just kidding. There's only one, the diminutive Albany pitcher plant from Western Australia, *Cephalotus follicularis*.)

My collecting gene kicked in at the age of 12 when I began hunting out plastic shopping bags, of all things.

I realise how weird that sounds, but let me tell you that when my grandparents went to England and came back with a green plastic Harrod's bag, I thought all my Christmases had come at once.

Since then, I've collected all sorts of oddities from green art glass and 1970s enamelware to perennial campanulas (in my first garden, I had 30 varieties). But my latest obsession is indoor cacti and succulents.





I ADENIA GLAUCA

A groovy summer-growing caudiciform, also affectionately known as a lump plant, due to its water-storing base.

A LIFELONG PLEASURE

Compared to Graeme Fieldes, I'm a latecomer to the charms of cacti and succulents. The former secretary of the Cacti and Succulent Society of New Zealand has been fascinated with them for more than six decades.

At the age of seven, Graeme started potting up offsets and cuttings from his aunt and great uncle's collections in tins not too dissimilar to mine. "I used empty baked bean tins but as I wasn't aware that they needed drainage holes in the bottom, I lost quite a few."

Despite those early casualties, by the time Graeme had left school in Hawera and gone to work "licking stamps" in a bank job, he'd amassed more than 600 plants. At the age of 18 he was promoted to an Auckland branch with only a fortnight's notice, forcing him to leave his beloved collection behind in Taranaki.

For 25 years, Graeme didn't have the time or space to start collecting again, and it was during this time that he met his wife, Susan. She had no idea what she was in for.

"When we met I didn't have any succulents because I often moved around with my job, but in 1984 we decided we weren't moving again. So I put up a glasshouse in the garden and away I went. Suddenly we were up to our eyeballs with them."

Graeme estimates that he currently has more than 2000 varieties, not to mention a fairly tolerant wife. "Susan prefers bromeliads so our garden has a demarcation. I'm allowed the sunny side and she has the shady side."

Will he keep collecting succulents until he has one of every species? "No, I think I'd be in line for a divorce if I tried that," he quips.

CACTI VS. SUCCULENTS

"All cacti are succulents," Graeme explains, "but not all succulents are cacti." The key difference between the two is that cacti are covered in cushion-like areoles – the small, circular pads from which their spines, hair and flowers emerge.

BACK IN FASHION

When I first started writing for *NZ Gardener* in the 1990s, the cottage gardening trend was on the wane and sculptural cacti and succulents were all the rage with minimalist garden designers. By the new millennium, bold aloes, agaves and echeverias had invaded the Ellerslie Flower Show en-masse and were such popular choices for easy-care courtyards that the publishers of my first book, *New Zealand Garden in Style*, chose a photo of *Agave attenuata* for the cover.

Since then we've witnessed a major renaissance in fruit and veg growing, but it seems that cacti and succulents are now making a quiet comeback, especially indoors. They're a perfect fit for the tiny home trend and they also appeal to interior designers and apartment dwellers with a taste for fish bowl terrariums.

At the specialist Highwic Plant Fair in Auckland last autumn, the cacti and succulent stall did a roaring trade – granted, I was one of their best customers – and Graeme Fieldes says business is booming. "I propagate plants and keep a note of my sales, year on year. At the recent Waitakere Home and Garden Show, I'd sold record numbers by the end of the second day, with a full day to go."

GROWING NEEDS

Unlike finicky maidenhair ferns, cacti and succulents are among the easiest indoor plants to keep alive, which is not to say that you can wilfully neglect them. They must have bright light – at least three to four hours of sunlight a day – or they'll end up looking stretchy and pale. (At the opposite end of the spectrum, if they get too heat-stressed, many turn red.)

Plant in gritty, free-draining potting mix. You can make your own with a 50:50 mix of quality potting mix and fine grade pumice. Some cacti growers recommend adding a layer of broken crocks or stones to the base of the pot for better drainage too, but that's not enough to compensate for drainage holes that are too small.

MAMMILLARIA PLUMOSA

This Mexican cactus hides in a cloud of feathery white, child-friendly spines. In winter it has scented daisy flowers. It grows into a cushion 12cm high, and 40cm round.



2

LITHOPS LESLIEI VAR. VENTERI

Lithops are quirky African succulents that have evolved to fit right into their desert habitat. It's easy to see why they're known as living stones. Keep dry in winter.



3

CRASSULA SOCIALIS

Hailing from South Africa's Eastern Cape province, this rosette-forming succulent has white flowers in spring. Indoor specimens need plenty of sun or they stretch.



4

PACHYPODIUM NAMAQUANUM

This upright, non-branching, chubby, spiny cactus with a distinctive topknot reaches tree size in its natural African habitat. It drops its leaves during its spring dormancy.



5

MATELEA CYCLOPHYLLA

A fat-bottomed Mexican caudiciform with a swollen corky base up to 15cm across. The vines sport smelly carrion flowers. Keep it completely dry when dormant in winter.



6

ECHINOCEREUS RIGIDISSIMUS SUBSP. RUBISPINUS

This pretty-in-pink Mexican cactus is slow-growing but worth the wait, with large, almost fluoro-pink daisies in spring.



7

RHIPSALIS PILOCARPA

A lovely Brazilian epiphyte with a neat weeping form and hairy stem segments. In early winter, it has starry cream flowers.



8

EUPHORBIA SYMMETRICA

For a talking point, plant a rare, roly-poly South African succulent. "Like round, fat plum puddings tied up in tartan cloths," according to the Coromandel Cacti label.



9

LITHOPS DOROTHEAE

This species of living stone has striking red markings. Don't water it at all over winter, when lithops are dormant, then resume watering in late spring.



10

SULCOREBUTIA MARIANA

Also known as *Rebutia steinbachii* var. *mariana*, this Bolivian alpine cactus is famed for its fluoro flowers. Needs bright light.



11

CRASSULA LYCOPODIODES

A South African succulent (also known as *Crassula muscosa*) with sprawling stems that look like lengths of intricately braided rope.



12

LITHOPS AUCAMPIAE SUBSP. EUNICEAE VAR. FLUMINALIS

A living stone with a very long name! After flowering, its lips shrivel then new ones grow.



13

SINNINGIA LEUCOTRICHA

My most-stroked succulent! This Brazilian caudiciform has stunning silver felted foliage followed by striking orange-red flowers. It needs a very sunny windowsill.



14

SULCOREBUTIA TOTORENSIS SPINOSIOR

A red-spined Bolivian beauty with colourful flowers. If growing indoors, ensure it gets bright light to keep it looking good.



15

ASTROPHYTUM MYRIOSTIGMA

This striking, spineless, ribbed Mexican cactus translates to "star plant" in Greek. It sprouts scented yellow flowers from its tip.



16

TITANOPSIS CALCAREA

This fascinating, mat-forming cousin of lithops produces clusters of stony grey rosettes with warty-looking tips.



17

DIOSCOREA ELEPHANTIPES

The weird and wonderful corky-barked elephant's foot is a deciduous caudiciform.



18

HAWORTHIA FASCIATA 'VARIEGATA'

Known as the zebra haworthia, this striped South African succulent has smooth leaves on top and pearl-like bumps underneath.



19

Repot every three to four years and rather than using granular fertiliser, add diluted (quarter strength) liquid fertiliser to your watering can during the growing season.

KILLING WITH KINDNESS

The fastest way to kill potted cacti and succulents is by overwatering in winter. With a few exceptions, most species need no water at all during their dormant period (from May until the end of October). Move outdoor container-grown plants under cover – a glasshouse or conservatory – and don't water indoor specimens until spring, unless they sit by a heater.

In their natural habitats, cacti and succulents are rarely cold *and* wet – this combination is a killer. "If you must water them in winter," adds Graeme, "then save it for a warm, sunny winter's day." Use lukewarm water and let the potting mix dry out completely between drinks.

Deciduous vining caudiciforms – bizarre fat-bottomed succulents with leafy tops, such as *Fockia edulis* and *Dioscorea elephantipes* – also have an off season. When they drop their leaves and go dormant, cut off the old vines and don't water them again until they burst back into growth.

Living stones, or lithops, should also be kept bone dry over winter. After flowering, their "lips" will pull apart and shrivel up, but that doesn't mean they're dying. They'll shoot off from the base again in spring.

Another thing to note about lithops is that if you've planted them in small pots on a sunny windowsill, you should try to shade the pots (slip a physical barrier between the window glass and the container) to stop the roots cooking in full sun.

PEST & DISEASE CONTROL

Cacti and succulents aren't the only ones to flourish in warm, dry potting mix – so do aphids, scale, mealybugs and red spider mites. If a severe infestation takes hold, spray weekly with a general purpose insecticide such as Kiwicare's Insect Hit or Confidor from Yates. You may need to repeat spray up to four times to break the life cycle of these pests.

FANCY FLOWERS

As well as their textural foliage, many popular cacti and succulents boast disproportionately large flowers, such as the big yellow daisies of lithops or the heavily scented, one-night-only blooms of cereus cacti. "Often these look their best around midnight so if I knew a flower was opening I'd set my alarm clock so as not to miss it," says Graeme Fieldes.

Growing up, I recall similar excitement whenever the giant San Pedro (*Trichocereus pachanoi*) beside our Onewhero farmhouse deigned to bloom. It was such a source of pride for my late grandmother, Patricia, that chapters of her family photo albums are dedicated to its progress.

Now well over five metres tall, that cactus began life as a stumpy cutting that Grandma filched, surreptitiously, from a factory garden in Huntly in the 1960s. In the Hallinan clan, it's fair to say that pinching cuttings to propagate is as much of a family trait as plant collecting. ❖

STARTING A COLLECTION

- Graeme Fieldes offers plant sales by appointment. Phone 09 520 3442.
- Coromandel Cacti, 170 Mt Wellington Highway, Auckland, offers most (if not all) of these species – and hundreds more. See cacti.co.nz.
- Join your local branch of the Cacti and Succulent Society of New Zealand, or visit one of their shows.

20 CEROPEGIA AMPLIATA

This leafless South African vining succulent is also called "bushman's pipe". Its tubular, green and white flowers look like squid-shaped balloons (or something X-rated). The vines grow up to 2m long – support them with a piece of mesh.

OVERWATERING IS THE FASTEST WAY TO KILL SUCCULENTS AND CACTI



July top & flop CROPS

*Lynda's regular roundup of
the best & worst performers
in her Hunua garden*





TOP & FLOP CROPS



NASTURTIUMS: You can harvest the peppery baby leaves and bold flowers of nasturtiums (pictured) to jazz up plain lettuce salads, but that's not why I'm so impressed with mine. I'm happy just to look at them. When everything else in the veg garden looks shabby and wet, nasturtiums remain a beacon of brightness.



'MEYER' LEMONS: Can you think of a more prolific year-round cropper than this undemanding citrus hybrid? Our humble 'Meyer' tree keeps us supplied with juicy lemons 50 weeks of the year (it's only ever without fruit for a fortnight in late May). It's visibly hardier than the 'Yen Ben' and 'Lisbon' trees I've planted right next to it, both of which get hammered by frost, taking months to recover from the defoliation.



ORANGES: I may have been a tad hasty in giving away my husband's juicer – he'd only used it once – because the 45-year-old navel orange tree at our Coromandel bach is laden with hundreds and hundreds of fruit. We may have to hire a cherry picker to harvest them all though, as the tree is easily six metres tall and at least as wide.



'PURPLE KING' BEANS: I sowed a packet of these indigo climbing beans in the first week of February because I wanted something quick to climb up my flax flower stakes. I didn't expect them to crop at all, let alone as well as they have. Even at the tail end of May we were still picking enough to eat for dinner a couple of times a week.



CAPE GOOSEBERRIES: What's the secret to big, golden cape gooseberries (above)? I wish I knew. I can't complain about their fecundity – the plants self-sow wantonly in our gravel paths so all I have to do is transplant them – but I wish they'd fatten up, and ripen fully, before the frosts hit.



CARROTS: I like to have a crop of carrots on the go at all times – they're such versatile vegetables – but my most recent sowing hit a snag. After I dug up my peanuts in autumn, I forked over the soil and immediately sprinkled carrot seeds over the bed. The carrots germinated evenly and were flourishing in neat rows until a large rat (I assume it was big, given the size of its hole) burrowed into the bed. It proceeded to dig out and shell all the peanuts I'd missed, uprooting my carrots as it went. Rats must have an incredible sense of smell if they can sniff out a buried peanut.



'SATSUMA' MANDARINS: My children have an insatiable appetite for mandarins but, sadly, so do fantails and waxeyes. You can try to protect the trees with netting but these birds are no fools. They just hop under it.



CHOOKS: I feel a bit guilty for criticising my chooks on this page last month. Since then hawks have picked off three of my fluffy Chinese silkies. Given that my chook run is fringed with mature trees, giving them plenty of space to take cover, I'm not sure what else I can do to protect them from aerial attack. Nature is what it is. ❀



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FOR VIDEO

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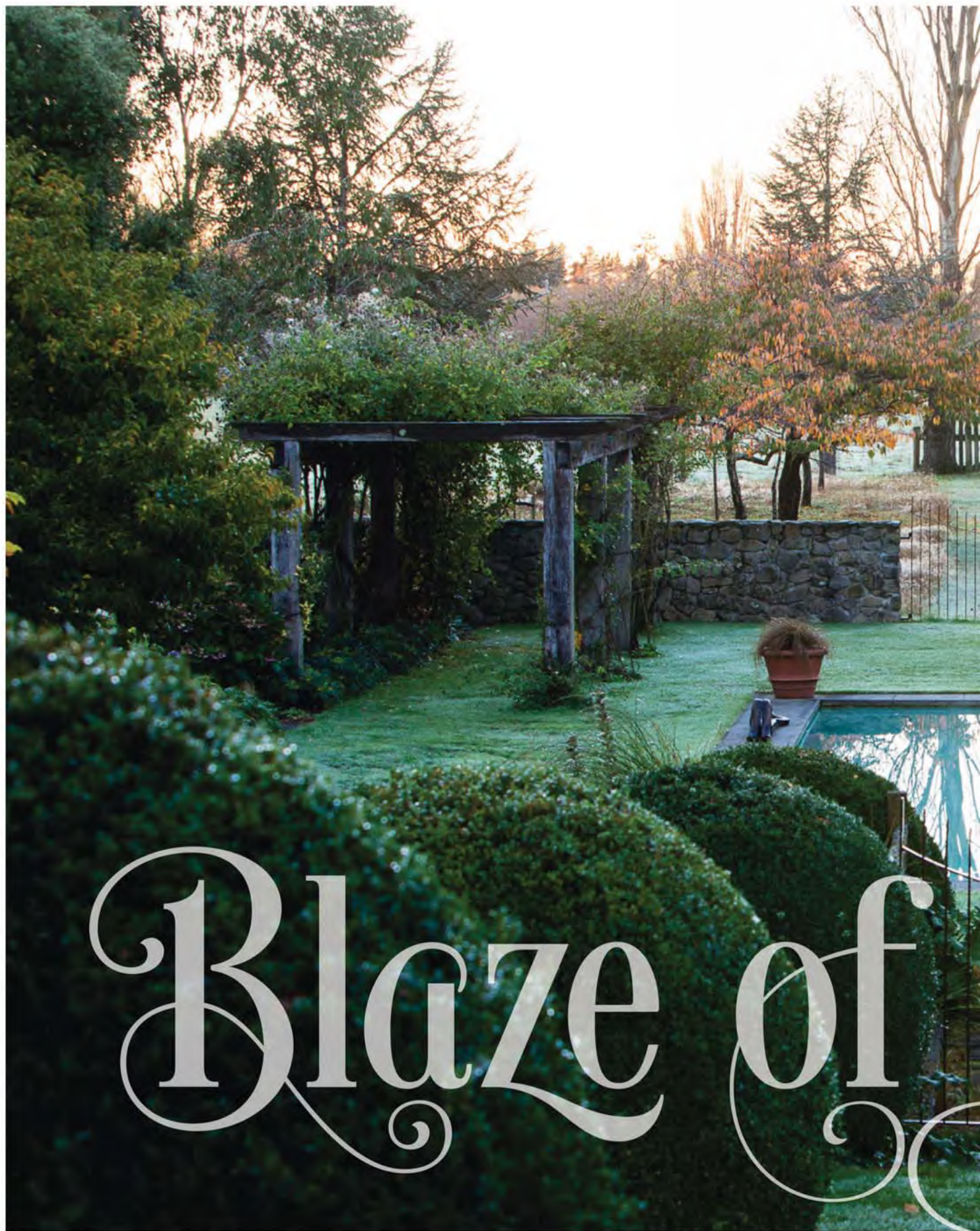
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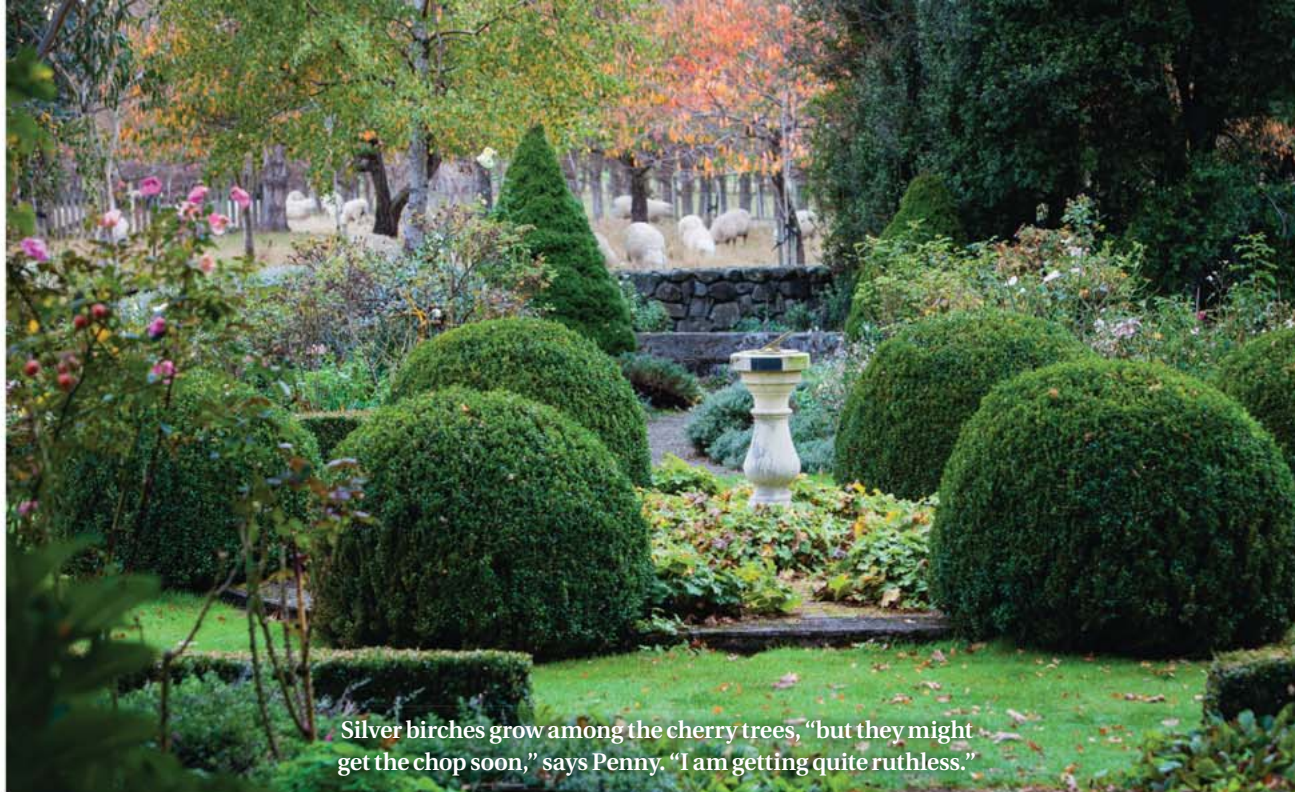


East of the house, flowering cherries give autumn colour. The ceramic sculptures by the pool are by Julie Butler. "The two lying on either side are a pair, then there is the little one doing yoga, whom I adore," Penny Zino says. "I built all the stone walls here myself. It's actually quite fun."

glory

Clever plantsmanship and strong design help the iconic Canterbury garden of Flaxmere to look good all year round

STORY: JO MCCARROLL
PHOTOS: CLAIRE TAKACS



Silver birches grow among the cherry trees, "but they might get the chop soon," says Penny. "I am getting quite ruthless."

Penny Zino expects a lot of her plants. Not only do they have to cope with north Canterbury's somewhat extreme climate – at her property, Flaxmere, the mercury can hit 40°C in summer, and winters see it sometimes drop to -15°C – there are also extended periods without rain. (When we speak, despite much of the South Island being in the grip of a torrential downpour, she has enjoyed about 16 inches of rain over the past 12 months. "Might as well be in a desert," she says wryly.) Nonetheless she expects plants to perform not once, but twice each year. "My mother-in-law Mrs Z taught me to plant things that are pretty twice a year. Look for things that are gorgeous in spring and offer wonderful autumn colour. I think that is fantastic advice."

As a result of this approach, from mid-April until mid-May her 3ha garden is a blaze of reds, oranges and yellows. "I planted all sorts of things that look good in autumn," Penny says, "but my very favourite autumn tree is *Nyssa sylvatica*, a North American native swamp tree that grows on the edge of the pond here. It goes a very bright red and holds on to its leaves for a month, or even five weeks, through strong winds."

Other stellar autumn performers here include oaks – Penny loves the genus and has planted all sorts, including scarlet-, pin-, turkey- and red-oaks. A group of oaks that were growing here when she first moved onto the property in 1966 are among the few trees from that time that remain. "I like the fact that they are tough," says Penny. "They have a long tap root and do well here. Anything that is too surface-rooted requires a lot of watering through our dry summers."

Those early settlers planted plenty of other things too. Penny and her late husband John had to clear out prunus, willows, poplars, ivy and periwinkle.

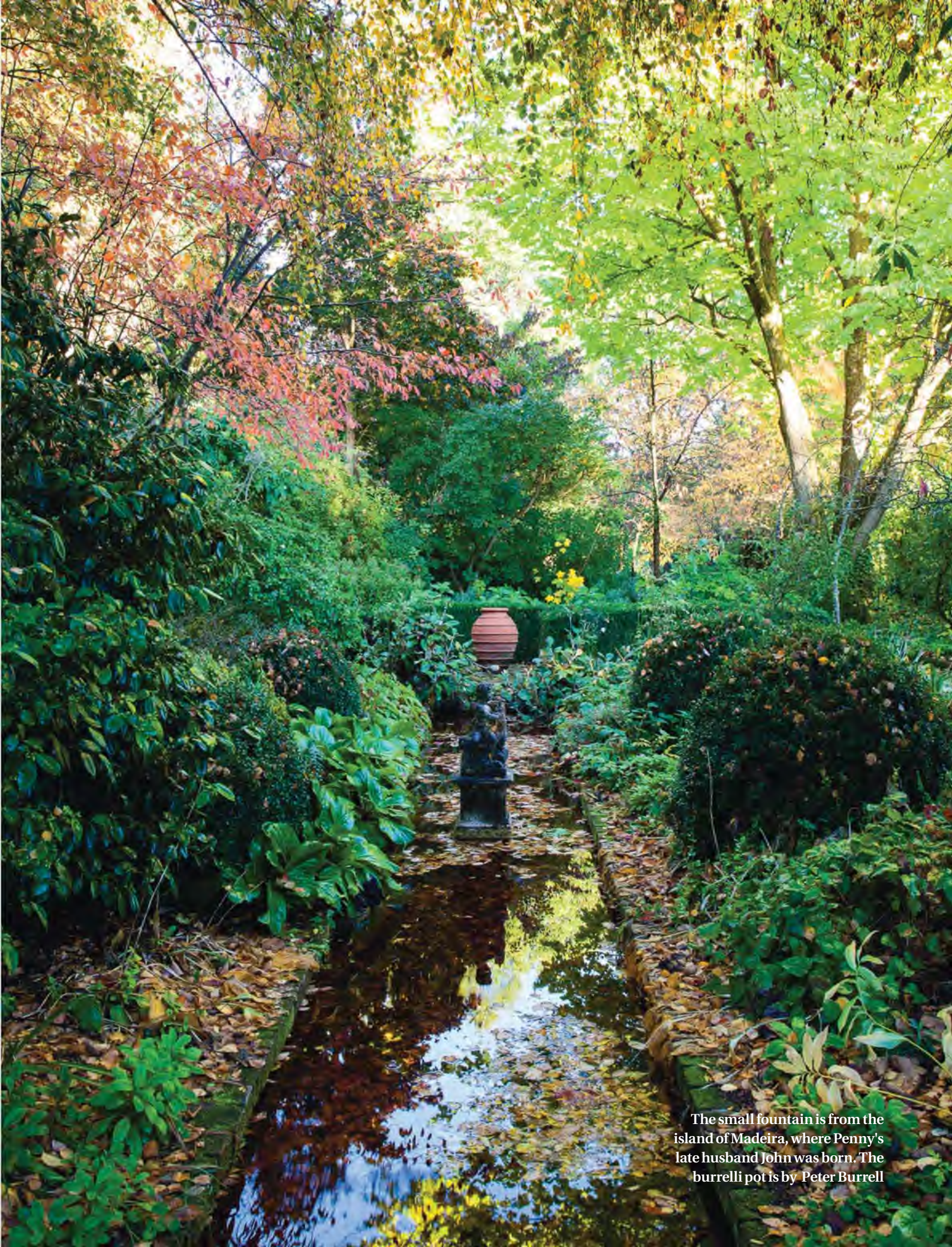
"When we first came here it was awful," she says. "Trees grew to within nine feet of the house – there was no sun at all." Some of those trees were huge pines and macrocarpas which had been planted to shelter the house from the prevailing wind, the famed and feared hot dry nor'wester that sweeps across the Canterbury Plains. "The wind here means nine times out of 10 your favourite tree will eventually have the top blown off it."

Penny took out the old trees and established her own shelter-belt – planting in three sweeps around the house and gradually removing the inner two layers as the outside one became established. "I have found that mixing deciduous trees with evergreens works really well against the wind here, providing a filter rather than a block. Planting something that provides a solid block creates down-drafts and eddies."

Once shelter was established she planted, well, everything and anything else. Her spring-fed creek, which feeds into her five connected ponds, means she has access to water, a necessity rather than a blessing if you want to garden in this extremely dry climate. "Plus the water brings bird life and an enormous sense of peace." Penny doesn't believe in pampering plants, though. "I can water if needed but I think you can over-water. A tremendous amount of gardening is using your eyes. I can spot a leaf looking dry 200m away! Then, and only then, will that plant get a drink."

On a six-week walking tour in the Himalayas, Penny saw plants surviving with no rain for six months at a stretch – rain only falls during the summer monsoons.

"It is quite interesting what will survive," she says. "You soon realise that some plants are just tough as. In this climate I've learned you have to plant quite a lot of things, and you have to be quite ruthless if they don't thrive. Plants have to be tough to stand it here."



The small fountain is from the island of Madeira, where Penny's late husband John was born. The burrelli pot is by Peter Burrell



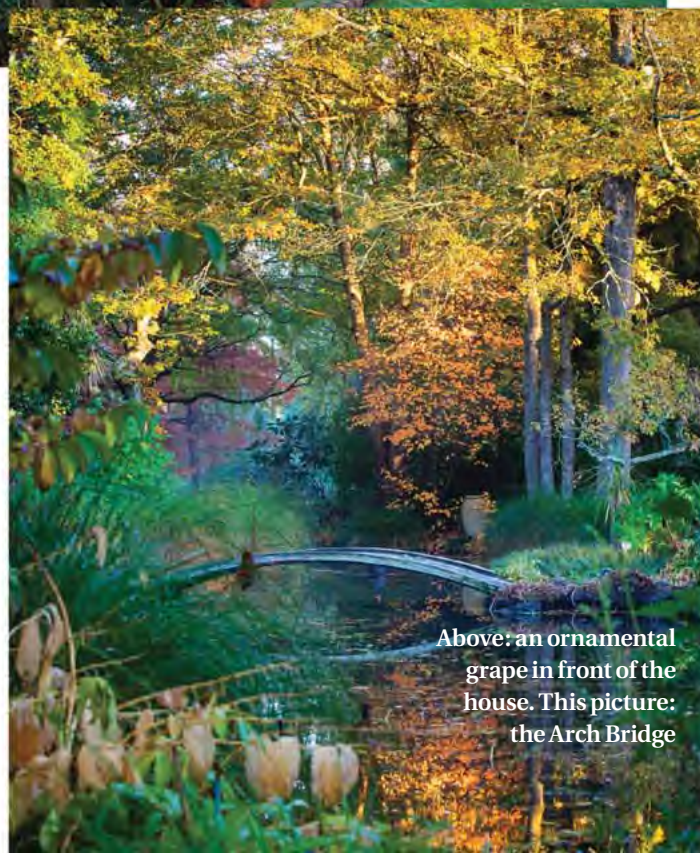
Penny with golden lab Bruno and her son's chocolate lab Monty



Meander by Isaac Neame



On the left a platanus and Hebe topiaria; and behind, a taxodium and pin oak.



Above: an ornamental grape in front of the house. This picture: the Arch Bridge

Smoke bush, especially *Cotinus americanus*, performs well, delivering pretty flowers in spring and brilliant orange-red colour in autumn. Amalancher also give the required twice-yearly show, as do cornus. "They have been slow to get going here, but I have one or two growing really well now." Penny also rates English beeches for their autumn tints and the flowering cherries *Prunus yedoensis* and 'Mt Fuji'. She established maples too, in sheltered places. "I have Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*), snakebark maples (*Acer capillipes*) and the lovely North American hybrid maple *Acer x freemanii* 'Autumn Blaze', which goes very red."

(Penny plans eventually to replace the flowering cherries to the east of the house with 'Autumn Blaze', believing it offers better autumn colour. She is struggling to get them established there though: "They seem to hate the roots of other things.")

She has found native trees hard to get going here too, and believes they are not as tough as some of the introduced trees she grows. "Well they are once they get to a certain size, but you just have to get them to that size! I find they are more vulnerable when they are getting started. I had some kauri and they reached 4m... but then I lost them, I think it was the dryness. But I have managed to establish all sorts of other natives: I have all the native beeches, mountain beeches, red beeches – they are all growing very well. I have totara, kahikatea and rimu too – they are slow-growing but are finally starting to look like little trees."



Mt Tekoa, part of the Southern Alps. The red tree is *Nyssa sylvatica*



Carex flagellifera in front of hebes, muehlenbeckia and toitoi



Muehlenbeckia astonii



Pseudopanax crassifolia



Hebe 'Red Edge'



A seedling kowhai



Mountain beech (*Fuscopora solandri*)

Penny's latest passion is for the New Perennials movement, popularised by Dutch garden designer Piet Oudolf. With her great friend Robyn Kilty (whose own prairie-style Christchurch courtyard we featured in the March issue of *NZ Gardener*), Penny attended a course Piet ran in Holland a few years ago, and she is now using his methods to plant her own prairie-style patch.

"One of the big differences is the European grasses Piet uses die right down in winter. But I am trialling it with our native grasses instead, like *Carex buechananii*, *Carex comans* and *Poa cita*. Piet uses a lot of quite tall perennials but here it has to be lower, or else the winds will knock it over. So I have echinaceas, rudbeckias, all sorts of things, but nothing that will reach over 1m. I am finding it works very well in our conditions. I love the lightness of it. The grasses give it an ethereal look."

A prairie garden is meant to be low-maintenance – you allow the plants to set seed, enjoy the seedheads over winter, then lop all the plants down at the end of winter and leave them on the ground as a mulch and wait for new seedlings to come through. Penny appreciates this aspect of the style as she seeks to keep the garden manageable for her. But it also represents a new way of looking at plants and gardening, and that is what keeps this passionate plantswoman engaged.

"A garden should never be static. I think that is one of the joys of it. I feel I am awfully lucky to have lived here long enough to see the changes there have been." ❀

• *Flaxmere* is open by appointment, flaxmeregarden.co.nz.

Garden plan



1 Carpark and entry to garden

2 Shade house and garden shed

3 Cottage

4 Cottage lawn

5 Paddock

6 Swimming pool

7 House

8 Rose garden

9 Pond

10 Top pond

11 Native area

12 Main lawn

13 Prairie garden

14 Woodland

15 Marquee lawn

16 Rill

17 Arch bridge

18 Office

19 Barn

Plan drawn by Renée Davies at Unitec's Landscape Architecture Department

NORTH ISLAND

Clockwise from top left: the gate came from Barry's family farm in Shannon; Barry made all the wrought iron framework using metal from his workshop; Scruff the dog enjoys a drink from the pond; the spherical shapes of *Acer platanoides* 'Globosum' and low camellia hedge surround the structure





GREEN WING

What does a gardener with a passion for ecclesiastical architecture and everything arboricultural do with 3 acres in the Waikato? Create a tree church, of course

STORY: ALISON WORTH PHOTOS: SALLY TAGG



Deciduous trees put on a stunning autumn show

You'd think that with a passion for trees and an encyclopedic knowledge of them that Barry Cox would have enjoyed a long career in arboriculture. Not so; before the age of 10 (too young to understand the criteria required for the top job at the Vatican), Barry wanted to be the Pope. Instead, he settled for the revered position of head altar boy in his home town of Shannon, in Horowhenua.

Barry thinks his appreciation for the architecture and pomp and ceremony of churches stems from his Italian ancestry. He fed this interest over many years touring New Zealand, Europe and America, often on a motorbike, studying the proportions, angles, heights and pitches of church roofs, walls and porticoes.

After planting more than 4000 trees on his 90ha dairy farm in the Waikato, Barry finally settled on a flat 1.2ha property near Cambridge. With a blank canvas, free-draining sandy loam and Mount Pirongia rising majestically in the distance, the climate, location and soil were ideal for growing specimen trees.

Connecting his love of trees with a desire for an income, Barry started Treelocations, a business that moves large trees (up to 6m tall) using a specially designed tree spade – a huge machine that resembles an apple corer. Mounted on the back of a truck, it works by digging down and under the tree to scoop up cleanly the whole plant, including its vast root ball.

There are only three such tree spades in use in New Zealand. "People know how much I love trees," says Barry, "so they call me when there are trees that would otherwise be cut-down or removed. I go and kind of rescue them." Rehoming semi-mature trees has enabled Barry to accelerate the landscaping of his own property, giving it the look of a project 20 years in the making rather than just four years old.

Trading trees, growing and moving them for clients deepened Barry's connection and knowledge of them over time, reinforcing his decision to surround himself with these stately plants. Cue his next project. "I walked out my back door one day and thought, 'That space needs a church' – and so it began. I cleared the area in April 2011 and made the iron frame, drawing on all the research I had done over the years of studying churches.

"I wanted the roof and the walls to be distinctly different, to highlight the proportions, just like masonry churches," he says. *Alnus glutinosa* 'Laciniata', or cut-leaf alder, was chosen for the roof. The variety is flexible enough to be trained over the temporary iron frame; in a few years the main branches of the alder will become the frame itself. It was important to have a sparsely foliated deciduous type for the roof to allow the light in, especially in winter, otherwise it would be too dark for guests to see and the floor of grass would die.

The altar has special significance: it comes from Barry's family church in Shannon, and is made of marble from Lake Como in Italy, from where his ancestors hail.

The walls of the church are *Leptospermum macrocarpum* 'Copper Sheen', an Australian tea tree whose foliage is thick and textured, with a colour that resembles stone. To keep it looking lush, Barry trims it every six weeks.

A 'Dublin Bay' rambling rose weaves its way around the top, chosen for the colour and romance it brings as well as for its long flowering season – the first blooms appear in October and it can still be in flower in June.

The church is set within a low border hedge of *Camellia* 'Black Tie', a dense hedging plant that requires little maintenance except for regular clipping. At the pathway entrance a pair of wrought iron gates, formerly on the Cox's family farm, set the tone for respectful behaviour – we are, after all, entering a church and its grounds.

Barry Cox with one
of his dogs, Scruff





The Tree Church seats 100 people; the altar comes from Shannon too

Perfectly proportioned *Acer platanoides* 'Globosum' rise out of the camellia hedge and stand sentry either side of the gateway. These lollipop-like trees do not grow very tall and sport bushy tops that require a little pollarding to keep them looking uniform.

Across the walkway from the church a double-lined avenue of *Betula utilis* var. *jacquemontii* or Himalayan birch, with their snowy-white, lacquered bark, leads to a labyrinth, the design of which is based on the walls of the ancient city Jericho in 460BC. Lined with mondo grass, Barry has had to discourage pukekos from pulling up the freshly planted juveniles.

Barry officially opened the Tree Church and grounds to the public in January this year, having bowed to pressure from relatives, friends and local garden clubs. It wasn't his original plan – he just wanted to grow a Tree Church for his own enjoyment, and realise his study of ecclesiastical architecture – but when his nephew asked if he could get married in the church, Barry couldn't say no.

It wasn't long before more happy couples found their way to celebrate their nuptials in this one-of-a-kind venue. A friend and former colleague, Donna Signal from Cambridge, was delighted to get married in such an unusual, living green space. "We wanted somewhere different and special, and the Tree Church is all of that and more," says Donna. "We are not religious at all,

"Gardeners are generous people who just want to share and enjoy with others. Visitors to the Tree Church tell me that their worries disappear"



An avenue of Himalayan birch line the path from the church to the labyrinth

but felt that the Tree Church gave our wedding a sense of venerability in a natural, relaxed and non-denominational way," she adds.

The effort and time it takes to create even the most simple of structures by pleaching trees together is no mean feat. So you would be hard-pressed to find another structure in the world in the same league as the one Barry Cox has created in this corner of the Waikato. Some "cathedrals" have been formed in Italy and the UK by planting trees close together, but none have the structural complexity of Barry's Tree Church.

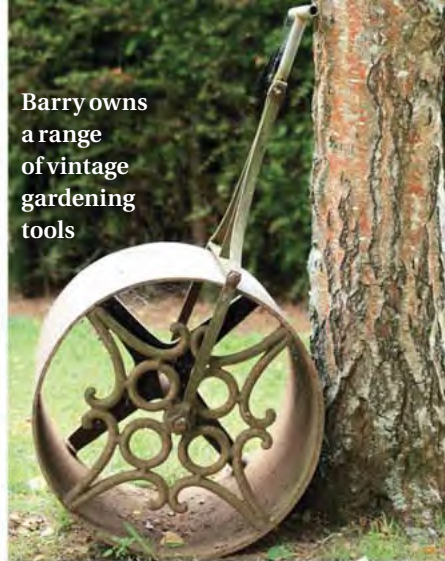
After a few local garden clubs had visited and been enthralled at Barry's sheer creativity and green engineering expertise, the formerly reluctant host was brought round to the idea by the gentle encouragement and rewarding feedback from fellow gardeners.

"I like that the gardener visitors enjoy and appreciate my Tree Church," he says. "I find that gardeners and those passionate about trees are generous people who simply want to share and enjoy with like-minded others. Visitors have said that they find the Tree Church relaxing and that their worries disappear. I find that sort of feedback immensely rewarding."

Barry Cox is not one to beat around the bush, if you'll pardon the pun. A spade is a tree spade in his view and he has been known to move trees three times until they're in exactly the right position. He is also well aware of the amount of maintenance and upkeep that a garden and all



Alnus glutinosa 'Laciniata' winds its way over the temporary roof frame



Barry owns a range of vintage gardening tools



Zephyroides candida



Gerbera hybrid

the trees within it demand. "It takes me five hours to mow the lawns and at least three hours of final primping to get the gardens and Tree Church to the standard I need to be happy for an event," he says.

Weather can complicate matters. If the day before an event is windy or rainy, or both, it takes even longer to remove wind-blown leaves and adjust shifted foliage. But Barry is not deterred, and when I ask him about his long-term plan for the gardens he shows me a specimen jar containing bits of his elbow cartilage. "My joints are wearing out," he says matter-of-factly. "So I am developing a chainsaw and hedgecutter that will be more manageable, especially as they are used weekly throughout the summer."

In addition to the existing vegetable plot, bog gardens and cut flower patch, there are plans to complete the European garden behind the tree church, creating a sense of balance with the labyrinth. There is also a natural amphitheatre that Barry would like to plant out for outdoor summer events.

Barry is now in his mid-60s, but instead of looking ahead to retirement and downsizing to a postage stamp-sized lawn and potted colour like many former dairy farmers his age, he is formulating a plan for the future of the Tree Church and fashioning equipment accordingly. It's this clever approach to adapting to changing circumstances and challenging that will stand him in good stead for years to come. ♣

Visit treechurch.co.nz for more info.



- | | |
|------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 Driveway | 6 Tree Church |
| 2 Pond | 7 European garden |
| 3 Labyrinth walk | 8 Avenue of trees |
| 4 Betula avenue | 9 Perennial cutting garden |
| 5 Tent | 10 Clipped hedge and topiary |

Plan drawn by Renée Davies at Unitec's Landscape Architecture Department

COMMUNITY GARDEN

Proudly supplied by



Waimarama Community Gardens
manager Helen Lynch, left, and
assistant manager Matiu Blair
by the demonstration beds

A full-page photograph showing two people, Helen Lynch and Matiu Blair, standing in a lush community garden. Helen, on the left, is wearing a blue jacket and a white headband, holding a black tray with small seedlings. Matiu, on the right, is wearing a brown vest over a green shirt and a tan cap, holding a long-handled tool. They are surrounded by various plants, including large green leaves in the foreground and tall spiky plants in the background. The garden beds are separated by chain-link fencing.

Trial and error

One community garden near Nelson is conducting an
complex study in soil improvement. By Christine Rush

MAIN IMAGE: MARION VAN DIJK



The six beehives are tended by a local beekeeper

The notion that New Zealand soils are deficient in key minerals and trace elements is not new. But few have gone to the lengths to investigate and fix it as one group of gardeners near Nelson.

Waimarama Community Garden has been a space for people in The Brook for 18 years. Two hectares are leased from Nelson City Council. Helen Lynch, the garden manager, says it was started in the 1980s when many locals struggled to find work. "It was a place for them to gather, grow some food and get experience."

Last year the volunteers cleared out the old tunnel house and brought in plants that normally struggle when Nelson turns chilly – eggplants, chillies, capsicum and passionfruit. "It's all an experiment – we're always experimenting! Any excess is given to Food for Families in summer."

The big experiment, though, was their effort to improve the quality of soil and the nutrient levels of the food grown in it. With funding from the Community Organisation Grants Scheme, they contracted a retired soil scientist to run an array of tests. Unlike many parts of New Zealand, it found the alluvial soil had too much

boron and calcium, and was deficient in magnesium and potassium.

The prescription? A fertiliser made from crushed shells and extra minerals and nutrients, applied for a year to two dedicated beds, so they can compare the Brix levels in the crops grown there with those in the unfertilised plots. The use of control beds shows admirable scientific rigour – it can't have been easy to forgo the potential flavour and nutrients.

In less than a year, the difference was obvious. By autumn the crops were showing higher Brix levels, and the crops will continue to be monitored for a few more years.

Compost is a key in any soil improvement plan, and this is spread all over gardens. Eventually the minerals will go into the compost rather than applied directly to the soil. Demonstration beds – medicinal and culinary herbs, a children's garden (popular for summer picnics), square foot gardening, no dig versus double dig – are an education for visitors too.

From early August the garden will be running workshops on seed propagation, bed preparation, bokashi and urban gardening. For details visit thebrookgardens.weebly.com.

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TALK TO YOUR PLANTS

Xanthe White meets *Tillandsia usneoides*, the wacky-looking air plant that disdains dirt

PORTRAIT: EMMA BASS

Q Spanish moss is such an evocative name! It's no wonder then that it has been adopted as a name for rock bands, as a title for a novel and used in song lyrics and literature.

A Yes, and yet our links with Spain are tenuous. Our origins actually lie in Florida, at the far south-eastern tip of the United States, among the now sadly extinct indigenous people who lived there. The Timucua people were a group of around 30 different chiefdoms with a common language who lived in the once-forested area where we grow naturally. The women used to make clothing with our fibres. Our colonies were prolific amid the southern oaks (*Quercus virginiana*) and bald cypresses (*Taxodium distichum*) of this area. But the Timucuas' demise stemmed from the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors in the 16th century. Waves of colonisation in the following centuries brought lethal diseases as well as battles over land and independence, and the tribes were extinct by the 19th century.

Q They had been your first contact with human civilisation – but that wasn't the end of your story, was it?

A No. Because of our ability to trap moisture and dust from the air, we are now used for everything from crafts to detecting air pollution. Although we grow in trees, we do not live off the tree itself. All the nutrients we need are collected in fine, barb-like scales along our fine leaves. Like most bromeliads, we are a flowering plant but generally we replicate by growth. You would be surprised to see how quickly a small clump can be divided, especially considering how expensive a small amount is to purchase.

Q So you are not even a moss? I would have thought that if not a moss, you might perhaps be a lichen?

A Not at all. We grow in trees, often in swampy areas though, so I guess to a story teller, who knows little about plants, moss is a description that made sense once upon a time.

Q And your flowers: are they beautiful?

A If you are small, yes, but to the human eye they are very discreet. They have a gentle fragrance that helps to attract insects. Our seeds are interesting too; they are very light and float with the wind until the small barbs attach themselves into the bark of a host tree. Our soft, light foliage has meant the birds unwittingly spread us around too, using the moss for their nests. This helps us reach into higher branches.

Q You started out life as an outdoor plant. But in our country I've mainly seen you in greenhouses?

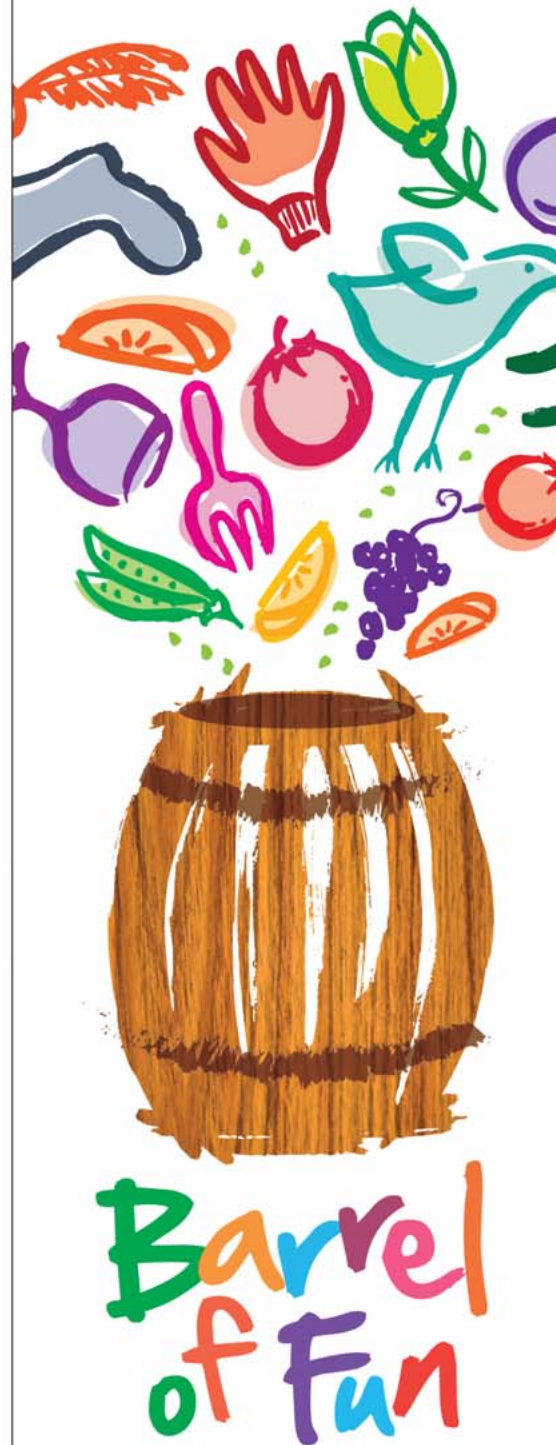
A We love being outdoors if it's warm enough. So in the northern parts of New Zealand with high rainfall, I will happily grow from a tree where there is good light and water. The more creative gardener might like to run us down chains or over wire baskets to create all sorts of fluffy forms and shapes. If you're keeping us inside, you must remember to water us well. When you spray our foliage you will see that it turns from a silvery colour to a mineral-green. This is a good sign.

Q You are a popular craft plant. I rather like the idea of you dripping down over the lower branches of my olive tree, or perhaps around the children's tree hut. But will you actually harm the tree if I introduce you to it?

A No, we do not take any nutrients from the tree but if the conditions are just right, and we spread up through the canopy as winds whip us up the branches, it is possible that we could smother the plant's own leaves. This is easily controlled though; to remove large drifts you can just pull us free and use the material as you wish. Over the years we've been combined with clay to insulate houses, used as stuffing for furniture or of course to be shared with friends...

Q And there's nothing a gardener loves more than a plant that can be shared! ❀

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IN SEASON

life after death

Summer blooms are spent, the garden is bare and Jack Frost pays a call – now's the time that the structure of many plants reveal their true beauty, says Neil Ross

Choose them well, and
seedheads and hips can
make for the perfect wintry
scene, even without the
shimmer of frost or snow –
each a perfect sculpture

I changed into slippers and dressing gown before 9pm the other night. What a luxury – but unfortunately one there is seldom time for these days. In our multipurpose sneakers-and-Tshirt lifestyles we have gone so casual, so “come as you are” for everything that the art of dressing for an occasion – even if it’s just to slob in front of a box set of *Breaking Bad* of an evening – has been consigned to history. Have we forgotten the sense of anticipation of scratching around for one’s cravat and battling drunkenly with braces as you dress for dinner? All right, we may not be living the *Downton Abbey* lifestyle any more but such transformations still serve to break up the rhythm of the day, and are little rituals that celebrate each mood of the moment.

It’s similar situation in the garden as seasons progress. With our equitable climate it’s all too easy to have flowers and foliage year-round in most parts of the country; to be lazy. But I want my autumns to blaze and crash and my winters to be markedly different too: skeletal, deathly and stripped bare. In a few places, at least, I want to peer through naked branches, see stretches of earth stripped bare and shiver at the sight of bleached carcasses of long-deceased grasses and lashings of sculptural seedheads.

Choose them well, and seedheads and hips can make for the perfect wintry scene even without the shimmer of frost or snow; each a perfect little sculpture. The secret is to choose a variety of shapes, preferably repeated the length of your

flowerbeds, and to take care that you don’t snap them all off in the course of your autumn tidy-up. If you have a lot of blobby evergreens then the skeletons of plants like monarda, phlomis and echinacea will lighten things up and make your borders dance, rather than plod.

A few seedheads will have been hanging on since summer, including ornamental alliums such as the big spheres of *Allium christophii*. Avant-garde gardeners bother to remount them on slender bamboo canes –

Chionochloa flavicans

As a winter composition, the mixture of seedheads set against more substantial evergreens is hard to beat. Here a mix of grasses weave between topiary and grey mounds of santolina with a central colony of bergamot (monarda) creating a lively seedhead silhouette. Try to use some of our native chionochloa grasses as a substitute for the exotic stipa varieties, which are now mostly banned from sale. (Pukerau Nursery)

PHOTO: GAP PHOTOS/ELKE BORKOWSKI



Aster novi-belgii

Michaelmas daisy heads dangle precariously like curtain tassels after winter winds have done their damndest to decapitate them. It’s a fine line between something looking artistically dishevelled one day and plain tatty the next, crying out to be edited out of view with a sharp pair of secateurs. By August many of the seedheads will need to be shunted offstage to allow for a good weed before spring. (Kings Seeds)



Rudbeckia fulgida

Several plants will give you punchy buttons that act as landing pads for frost or snow, and the slowly spreading colonies of my favourite *Rudbeckia fulgida* var. *sullivantii* ‘Goldsturm’ are ever reliable. Never too tall and easy to divide to give away morsels to friends, this golden daisy flowers for months in good soil and continues to give through the winter. (Parva Plants)



Rosa 'Rambling Rector'

This variety is a tad less stiff and vigorous than the similar 'Wedding Day', but both these mammoth climbers wreath themselves in sprays of winter hips – making up for their rather brief though spectacular summer flowering. If you have a tree that you don't like, then this is the rose to encourage to scale it then, over the years, slowly kill it. Murder never looked so beautiful. (Southern Roses)

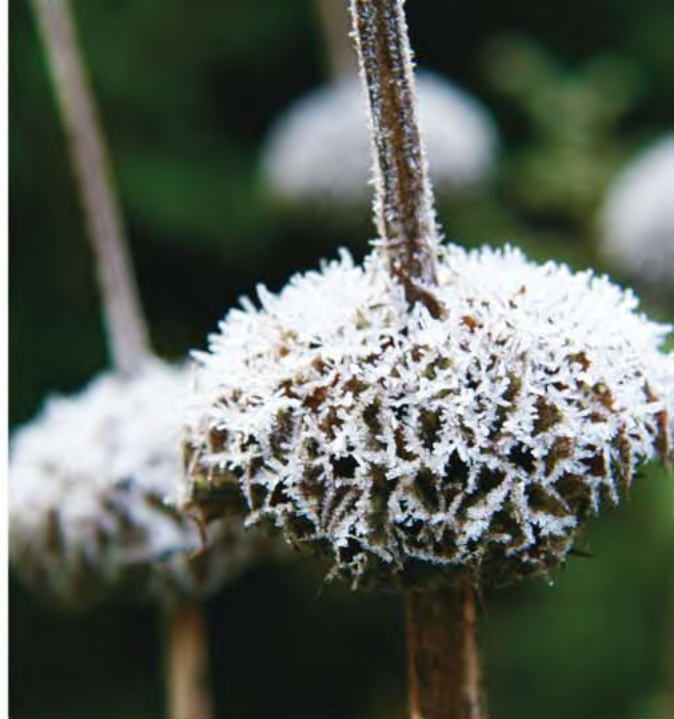


Sedum 'Autumn Joy'

Known also by its proper name 'Herbstfreude', this is the classic butterfly landing pad. Although there are a host of other great varieties with more interesting leaf colours in summer, none have the staying power of 'Autumn Joy' when it comes to those beautifully solid seedheads held right through winter on stout stems. They still look so good that I loathe cutting them down even as the new growth rises up through the following September. (Joy Plants Nursery)

Phlomis russeliana

There's a term for words that sound like what they describe: onomatopoeia. 'Whorl' is such a word. There are shrubby Jerusalem sages but *Phlomis russeliana* is the herbaceous one and the king of whorls for its lemony labiate flowers that encircle the metre-high stems in early summer, leaving behind great pompoms along their masts as regular as a poodle's haircut. A mass of this groundcover in frost is a sight to behold. (Kings Seeds)





perhaps spraying them red or orange to highlight their exquisite geometry – but those with less time and less nerve just let them lurk artfully. Grasses contribute much height and form in winter and perhaps the most useful are the miscanthus, which will last until August if gales don't rattle the leaves free of those slender canes and make a mess of your borders. The silkier seeds of grasses like cortaderia and chionochloa (some clematis too) look best where they will catch late afternoon or morning sunshine, which brings them to life.

Slender seedheads can be provided by the likes of astilbes, species foxgloves and the lovely perennial *Verbascum chaixii*, which comes in white or yellow forms and never gets too tall, but lythrums leave behind airy columns that reach to head height and yet are stiff enough to last through winter and beyond unsupported.

Perhaps the biggest seedheads of winter are those of the herb angelica (*Angelica archangelica*), but in truth any member of the carrot family will provide the same intriguing silhouettes of spokes artfully arranged on ribbed stems. Thistles are another good source of winter structure; none more impressive than a stand of cardoon, the decorative artichoke. These hefty beasts will need some serious staking if they are to last until midwinter though, unlike the stately cardiocrinums (*Cardiocrinum giganteum*) you often see in southern parts of the country. This giant lily must have the sleekest and most impressive seedheads of any plant, each fashioned like the nose of an Art Deco bullet train. Telekia is another gutsy plant. Its shaggy summer daisies resemble vintage tassled lampshades but the trimmings have dropped away now leaving a candelabra of chocolate dinner plates. The damp gardens where telekias grow best have a wealth of good seedheads, from tall ligularias to wands of spent hosta blooms, but perhaps the most versatile plant for moist soils are the monardas which are self-supporting and leave behind quite bold crowns of papery bracts. Monardas like to move around and spread each year but it's easy enough in spring to dig up the healthy outer pieces and plant them into a fresh bit of soil. The new varieties get over the old problems that plants had with mildew.

Though seeds like cardiocrinum or opium poppy are artworks in themselves, deserving to be propped or even gathered on a tabletop or vase with the likes of echinacea or rudbeckia, their real value lies in their massed effect out in the open – no single seedhead raising the pulse.

Verbena bonariensis

This is essential in the garden: it flowers for ever, is self-supporting, attracts wildlife and even the clustered seedheads look good for a while before storms bring them crashing down. One obvious spin-off from leaving seedheads intact is the self-seeding that results, but herein lies the problem: because *Verbena bonariensis* self-seeds too readily it can become a nuisance, so keep a tight reign. (Sold regularly on Trade Me)

As gardeners we are called to become horticultural undertakers, preparing bodies for the funeral. We want to highlight the plant's best bits and hide the rest – trim away leaves that are shrivelled and prune back to reveal the beauty of each form. For even after it has breathed its last, there can be a rather beautiful life after death.❀



Anaphalis triplinervis

As its common name, everlasting, suggests, this lovely little edging plant has pretty papery flowers that emerge in late summer and last the distance over the winter. The seedheads have a silvery hue which beautifully complements the grey foliage. Give it a well-drained soil and plenty of sunshine and split colonies every few years to keep the flowers coming.



Agastache 'Astello Indigo'

It's funny how many good seed plants are also good bee plants. And none is quite such a honeypot to wildlife as the agastaches. There are some lovely varieties, mostly with blue spires in high summer. *Agastache 'Astello Indigo'* is bushy and strong growing, though it won't always come through a wet winter. The seedheads are dense and pale and stand well for a long time – rather like another good performer, stachys. (Kings Seeds)



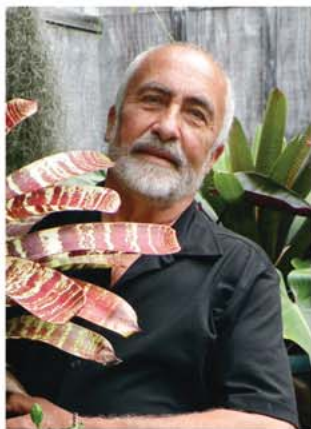
Simply snowdrops

Bring cheer into your home this winter with an effortless bouquet of bulbs

WITH THEIR UNPRETENTIOUS FORM and delicate shades, it's hard to improve on the perfection of early bulbs. Many gardeners like to leave them to brighten the ground beneath bare trees and shrubs, but if you want to bring spring indoors keep your arrangements simple.

THE CONTAINER IS KEY. Don't let it overwhelm the beauty of your bloom. Whether you choose a china posy-holder, a vintage can or even a glass jam jar, it should be a down-to-earth foil for the flowers, prepped and placed without too much thought in the makeshift vase.

✂ FROM NORTH TO SOUTH ✂



70 NORTHLAND

Cannas, aquaponics, bulb meadows, rose pruning & fun with fungi – our regional experts talk about what's happening

in July



72 AUCKLAND



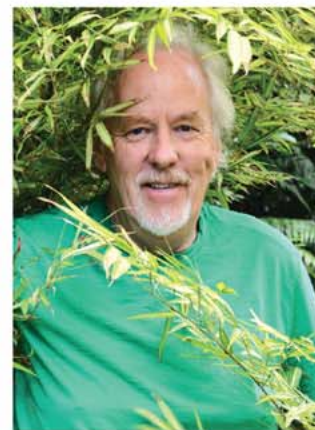
73 WAIKATO



74 TARANAKI



77 HAWKE'S BAY



78 KAPITI COAST



80 NELSON



82 AKAROA



84 DUNEDIN



86 SOUTHLAND



Canna indica var.
warscewiczii, a cultivar
of the Indian shot plant

Loud & proud

Cannas — those gaudy, messy party animals of the garden — are really just gingers in drag. They can be loud and obnoxious and there are days when I don't know if I love them or hate them

The huge ginger whanau also includes bananas, heliconias, marantas and strelitzia (birds of paradise) — all pretty flamboyant characters compared with other more sedate garden residents. They all grow in the same way, with ground-level rhizomes supporting tall, broad-leaved flower stems that collapse and die off after flowering.

Cannas have been known in North America as the Indian shot plant.

This was because the hard, round seeds were often used in flintlock muskets when the ammo ran out in colonial times. The same term crops up in South Asia, in accounts of the Indian Mutiny. The 19 wild species of cannas all originated in subtropical and tropical America, from South Carolina all the way down to northern Argentina. They have been crossed and re-crossed to develop the huge array of flamboyant, large-flowered hybrids we see in gardens today.

Many of the wild forms have tiny flowers, like the exquisite *Canna indica* var. *warscewiczii*. Others, such as *Canna iridiflora*, have larger, pendulous, bell-like blooms on very tall stems. Although most canna breeding has been aimed at creating spectacular, large flowers, some cannas have been bred for their unusual foliage like the dizzily striped 'Tropicanna' and the chocolatey 'Australia', whose fiery red flowers are soundly trumped by the rich brown-red of the leaves. The multitudes of cultivars range from delicate little dwarf forms to 3m giants. They are all ravenous feeders and in the garden they need regular grooming to keep them looking good.

It has been a revelation to me that cannas are also food!

In fact cannas are a good source of starch and are still considered an important food crop in the Andes of South America

as well as in parts of Asia. The rhizome contains about 25 per cent starch in a highly digestible form. The starch grains are very large and easy to separate from the fibre in the rhizome. All cannas are edible but the main agricultural form, *Canna discolor*, has been bred to be a very large, fast-growing plant with rather insignificant yellowish flowers on 3m high stems. The rhizome can be as thick as a man's forearm and it is grated to a pulp, washed and strained to remove the fibre. The starch can then be dried and used as flour or as a substitute for arrowroot. In Vietnam it is grown extensively to make cellophane noodles; the young leaf shoots are used as a vegetable and all leaves, rhizomes and stems are an important animal fodder. The smoke from burning leaves is insecticidal and in some parts of Asia the mature leaves are made into paper.

In Peru, meanwhile, the very young rhizome is traditionally baked for about 12 hours to make a sweet mucilaginous stew which contains about 10 per cent protein so is a valuable staple food.

Cannas in general like rich, moist soils and are heavy feeders.

In a home garden it is important that spent stems are removed at ground level as soon as the flowers finish, because the stem starts to die back at that stage, making the clump increasingly tatty and unattractive. The entire clump should be cut back to ground level in June or July when flowers finish.

Like all members of the ginger family, cannas are greedy growers — give them plenty of plant food every spring and summer to ensure the clump remains vigorous. Every three years they usually need to be dug out and started again elsewhere from small pieces, as the soil will be exhausted.

As you would be if you'd hosted a party this raucous for three long years! ❀



Canna iridiflora 'Ehemannii'



Wild species of *Canna indica*



Canna 'Australia'



Cold comfort

In the winter every single thing in my garden slows right down almost to a standstill, including me

This is only right and proper for the time of year – and certainly not any sign of laziness on my part. I think things should slow down in cold weather. The sun takes longer to rise, the nights get longer, the slow cooker is operating at full tilt. Your compost heap slows down too, as the temperature drops and the plant-digesting microbes start to work more laboriously. In fact, if the temperature of your heap drops below about 20°C the microbes stop working altogether. Maybe they're already dreaming about breaking down tropical fruit in the islands somewhere?

Heat is produced by the microbes digesting your organic matter.

So if your compost is “working” then it helps provide the conditions it needs to work, if you see what I mean. You can help these hard-working microbes in their labours by shredding or chopping any material you add in winter into pieces that are 5cm or less, so they are easier to break down. (Larger pieces are a good option in warm weather if you want to improve air circulation in compost but smaller bits have more surface area and it's on the surface where the helpful microbes operate.)

Shredding is less important for very soft leaves and plant matter but, as a rule of thumb, the tougher and woodier the material, the smaller you should try to make it. Try whirring your suitable food waste in a blender with a little water and just pouring the resulting soup over the top of your heap, or (counter-intuitively) toss scraps in the freezer before you add them to your pile. Freezing and then thawing causes the cells in plant material to burst; this too helps it break down more quickly.

In summer, it's a good idea to turn your heap regularly to let air in.

Sometimes you'll need to let the heat dissipate too – anything hotter than 65°C and the beneficial microbes start to die off. In the winter, turn less frequently, if at all, to retain the heat. You can insulate your system by throwing an old carpet, tarp or a thick layer of straw on top. Snow makes a great insulation layer too if you have a winter-white garden now. Straw bales stacked round the outside will help, as will cardboard; in cold places consider lining the inside of a new bin with a layer or two of cardboard before you start using it. Finally a compost heap needs a certain amount of critical mass. For thermophilic composting to take place, your heap will need to have a volume of 1m³ or more. You want it big enough to retain heat and moisture but not so big that it becomes unwieldy to turn. The cooler your area, the bigger you might want to go. If you are in an especially windy spot, you might also consider a bigger heap – wind will dry compost out and lower its temperature.

If you want to check on the temperature of your heap, it can be as simple as looking at it!

If steam is rising from the top, it's probably working well. If it isn't, push your hand into the pile to see how warm it feels (use a plastic bag or rubber glove if you are of a squeamish disposition). If it's not warm enough, consider taking some of the steps I've outlined. Unless, that is, the idea of doing so leaves you overwhelmed with winter entropy. In that case, don't worry: do nothing. Even if your heap freezes solid, the beneficial microbes will come back in spring and it will start working again. ❀

UNDER COVER AGENTS

There are orchards, and then there are orchards. The first is a monoculture that depends on lots of human intervention

The second contains diverse plants supporting a comprehensive ecosystem. Nature does what it has spent the past zillion years evolving to do, without relying on us for nutrients, insect control and disease prevention. Sound idyllic? Actually it's neither hard nor complicated. It's just a case of observing and working with nature.

For every bug or disease that can harm your tree or fruit, Mother Nature has developed a control.

If there are enough bugs and bacteria around, they all balance themselves out – all you have to do is harvest the fruit with the acceptance that not every one is going to be export-level perfection. This approach relies on a year-round habitat and food for the controls. Without it they will move out, leaving your orchard unprotected and wide open to baddies.

Understorey planting not only provides food (flowers and nectar) and habitat (sheltered spaces, decaying matter). Some plants actually repel the baddies; others excrete a scent that camouflages your crop. Some concentrate nutrients into their leaves for easy harvesting. Many are edible. All turn a row of bare trunks into a beautiful garden that is all the more special for its interconnections.

I loathe the trendy term “food forest” – I think it has unrealistic connotations – but an integrated ecosystem is attractive, functional, easy to look after and produces nutritious food.

One factor to consider in terms of understorey species is sunshine.

Growing fruit is all about harvesting sunshine, so you want your understorey plants to be under, rather than competing with, your favourite apricot. You need shade-loving plants. With the exception of soft fruits, most edible plants want their own sunshine, which is where the concept of a food forest often falls down.

I'm a live-and-let-live sort of gal. I like understorey plants that look after themselves.

Borage is my favourite; it pops up all over the place in spring, is popular with bees in summer and composts down again in autumn. It seems to move around a bit – or maybe it's just surviving my haphazard weeding!

Nasturtiums are another understorey plant I'd like, but our frosts knock them back each year. The orange-coloured ones are said to repel aphids and control the spread of woolly aphid in apple trees. They protect against white-fly and attract insects away from brassicas. They even help radishes get a good hot taste!

Peppermint geranium is another I have not yet successfully established. This, too, is said to be a good companion, especially at keeping the codling moth from apples.

Many of the strong-scented plants are good companion plants. Korean mint looks after itself and fennel pops up so frequently it is almost a weed. Lavender and garlic work as good companions but like their share of sunshine.

Sage is another favourite, sprawling happily in shade before being harvested in spring to kill any moths in my wardrobe.

I love alyssums but they have never lasted long here, but the cosmos are happy survivors from a wildflower mix five years ago. (Most wildflower mixes out there like sunshine, which is fine when the trees are young but not really suitable as long-term understorey planting.)

Comfrey is a permaculture favourite, as its deep tap root concentrates nutrients into the leaves, which mulch down in autumn. I'm sceptical about its benefits in the understorey, though. I figure my fruit tree will send down its own roots to source nutrients and would rather not have any competition – but it is a fantastic fertiliser. I grow mine in a dedicated area and harvest the leaves for compost tea.

Don't underestimate grass levels, either.

Dandelions, clover and yarrow all flourish in my orchard – I just have to hide the lawnmower from my husband to stop him decapitating them! Consider your orchard trees a bit like your husband.

They need constant attention, occasional effort, good company and lots of food, and in return they should provide. By regular attention I mean check on them regularly and give them some loving when they need it: fruit picked when ready, broken and unwanted branches removed straight away, regular feeding and a wide range of companions. This last one is important: no tree is an island! ❀





Bluebells planted on the margins, drifting through the park area

Magic carpet

July may be our bleakest month, but it is also snowdrop time. These little charmers brighten the greyest of days

You can never have too many snowdrops in my opinion, and the varieties that do well with us are building up to a satisfying level. By definition, that is when we have enough to move them out of optimal garden or nursery conditions and start establishing them in carpets.

It is our interest in what we call "romantic gardening" – others refer to it as naturalistic gardening – that means we derive as much, if not more, pleasure from plants naturalised in meadow conditions as we do from cultivated, tightly maintained garden beds. It is a blurring of the edges in gardening, exploring how far we can replicate the simple charm of wildflowers but in a managed situation.

It is not as easy as it sounds. Many of the bulbs are used to much harsher conditions in their natural environment. Most growth stops in winters that are very cold and often dry, or in summers that are hot and dry. But in our dairy-farming heartland, soft conditions keep grass growing year-round and that growth will simply swamp most bulbs. It has taken us some years to learn to manage this. Selecting bulbs that will cope in our conditions has been trial and error.

It also takes eleventy thousand more bulbs than you think it will.

Even bulk buying a couple of hundred bulbs is not going to create much of a carpet in the short term. To get a quick result using large bulbs like daffodils or bluebells, planting at one every 10 sq cm means 100 per sqm. I worked this out because I was planting a little mixed area. Using dainties like erythroniums, dwarf daffodils, snowdrops, rhodohypoxis and crocus, it took about four of these small bulbs per 10 sq cm – or 400 per sqm. That is a large number and may explain why we don't see many bulb meadows in this country, beyond well-established fields of daffodils dating back many decades. Obviously, if you plant at greater spacings, you can cover a larger area but you will wait longer for the carpet effect.

Planting around tree trunks is not the same thing as naturalising bulbs in a meadow situation.

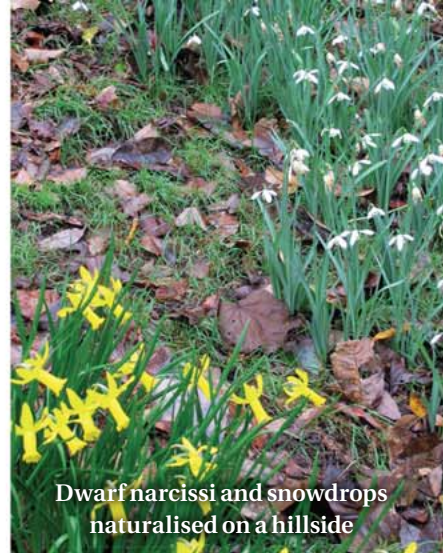
But this proved to be a good place to start for us. We have many trees in fairly open situations where it is possible to establish easy bulbs beneath. Most bulbs need sun so these need to be trees with a higher canopy to allow light below. Planting amid the exposed roots of established trees ensures the bulbs don't get mown off or trampled as they surface and they generally get established with little competition. It is also an effective way of controlling some of the invasive bulbs like ipheions and ornamental oxalis.

Scattering seed is hit and miss, and slower to give any results but much easier. We were delighted this year to see *Cyclamen hederifolium* showing its colours where Mark had scattered fresh seed several years ago. He had given up hope that it would work but lo, there are rewards for patient gardeners and the older we get, the more patience we seem to be developing.

Bluebells are easy and we have used them in swathes around shrubs in our park area. Because they are flowering at the same time as the full flush of spring grass growth, we have to keep them to the side of mown areas. Bluebell, and indeed snowdrop, woods that we have admired in Britain are carpets beneath deciduous trees. Our woodland areas are heavily dominated by evergreens so we don't get enough light to replicate those carpets here. That is why we have to opt for the margins instead.

The triumph of experience has been naturalising dwarf narcissi and snowdrops in grassy banks.

To do this, Mark spent some years establishing the native grass, microlina. It is finer and less vigorous so doesn't swamp the bulbs and can be controlled with minimal cutting – just a pass over with the weed eater from time to time. It is not quite the same as a bulb meadow, but we have learned to work with what we have here. ❀



Dwarf narcissi and snowdrops naturalised on a hillside



Colchicum autumnale



Lachenalia aloides and muscari



Abbie with a tray of *Nerine pudica*

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A girls-only zone



The goldfish 'pond'

MY SPACE

I have a recycled greenhouse, one of those Trade Me bargains: a jumble of windows, doors and roofing presented to my winning bid in a heap

Getting this treasure trove of glass and aluminium home and put up in my garden was no easy feat. I am not blessed with a home handyman. My bloke is a pen-pusher; the worst injury he ever experiences is a paper cut. Luckily he does come with practical friends and kind neighbours, who helped to erect my new glasshouse facing north in the warmest part of my garden.

There is lots of fun to be had in a glasshouse. The first rule I imposed was that it would be a girl-only zone: no boys allowed. To preserve the integral structure of this building, this also meant the trampoline and all ball games were to be moved from the vicinity. Over the years I have draped and decorated my tropical sanctum in solar lanterns, paper lamps and bunting. I even have a comfortable chair where I escape with a glass of wine and a good book (gardening-related, of course) on those cooler winter days. Stepping inside always makes me feel like I am on some tropical retreat.

I have had lots of fun trialling tropical and heat-loving plants that would not usually grow in temperate Hawke's Bay. I planted a dwarf Cavendish banana but it

just sat and sulked. I got sick of its prima donna ways as it was taking up too much room. It must have known what I was thinking as it soon rotted around the roots and died. I also have some dragon fruits. These large, prickly cactus-like plants produce a bright red fruit with white pulp, said to taste like a cross between kiwifruit and melon. Of course I've yet to taste dragon fruit as I am still waiting patiently for it to decide to produce. It is only because of its novelty that it remains!

Now, you may be thinking that I grow only plants that can be eaten.

I have a couple of tropical ones in my glasshouse, though, just for their appearance. One of them is my tropical frangipani, growing in a pot. It flowered for the first time this summer and was still in bloom in April. The fragrance has to be my favourite! I took to wearing a single flower pinned to my shirt as a brooch, just so I could enjoy the perfume.

My other frivolous plant is my blue tropical water lily. I grow this in a large glazed pot in the corner. It was a bit shy this summer but I have great expectations for the next.

In the pot I also have goldfish. They have two jobs. First, they keep on top of any mosquito larvae in the water; second, they are there to poop... lots. Their poop has a very important job too. It helps me to produce wonderful fresh vegetables and salad greens.

Aquaponics is a food production system where fish are used to grow food. The fish excrete waste (ammonia) into the pond water, which is then pumped into a soilless planter bed. Bacteria in the bed convert the ammonia into nitrates and then nitrogen, which helps the plants grow. The water is then returned, cleaned and oxygenated, to the fish.

There is a small pump in the goldfish pond that pumps the water up into a trough where I have lettuce and spinach growing in a soilless system. Using gravity this water runs over their roots, then drains back into the pond, again cleaned and oxygenated. The plants are grown in small perforated pots and pumice in a soilless system. The pond pump does not need to run continuously. I have mine on a timer so that it only comes on for 15 minutes every hour.

It is a great system: the only input required is food for your fish. The plants get all their nutrition from the fish poop and the plants clean and aerate the water for the goldfish. There is no watering, fertilising or weeding necessary. I can simply happily sit with my book and enjoy the ambience of a trickling water feature, frangipani fragrance, plants growing and boys playing in the far distance... bliss! 🍀



Justicia carnea 'Alba' – available
from Woodleigh Nursery – is
a fast-growing shade lover



Supernova



Colensoa physaloides



Malvaviscus arboreus



Liriope muscari

Large, handsome flowers amid bold foliage ensure you can't miss *Justicia carnea* 'Alba' when it starts flowering in early winter

This shrubby perennial enjoys a shady situation and grows easily in any reasonable soil. Mine makes a handsome pairing with the equally glossy-leaved perennial *Ligularia reniformis*, but this is one of those plants that looks good wherever it grows. It's subtropical by nature, so frosts won't be to its liking, but with overhead shelter from trees or shrubs it can be grown in many a mild winter garden.

This is a plant that grows fast and can get leggy, so pruning is recommended. If its pink-and-yellow flowered cousins are anything to go by, it will root easily from cuttings. I find the pink variety 'Rubra' is so keen to reproduce, new plants spring up almost as soon as I throw prunings onto the compost heap.

The white *justicia* isn't an easy plant to get hold of, but recently Janica Amooore at Woodleigh Nursery in Taranaki (woodleigh.co.nz) has been propagating it and often has a few available. She has the handsome yellow-flowered variety 'Aurea' too, which would make an intriguing companion for the white.

Shade plants don't come much tougher than *Liriope*. These glossy-leaved, cold-hardy, remarkably adaptable perennials are ideally suited to the dry soils underneath established trees, because they have fleshy, bulbous roots that sustain them even during prolonged periods of drought. I use the plain *Liriope muscari* as groundcover in tough, shaded

areas, always enjoying the slender-stemmed, grape-purple flowers in late summer. Last year I spotted the green and gold *Liriope muscari* 'Variegata', at Gus Evans Nursery here on the Kapiti Coast. I decided to try it as a way to add colour to a dark area among ferns and palm trunks, and it has been very successful there. Unlike the plain *Liriope muscari*, which thrives in sun as well as shade, the variegated form needs low light or the foliage will burn at the edges.

The *liriope*s are so tough that they can be unceremoniously dug up at any time and replanted. Division of established clumps will give you an easy-care, easy-on-the-eye, weed-suppressing planting.

Almost 30 years ago we planted our first *Malvaviscus arboreus*.

Considering it to be a shade lover, I planted it beneath a big *hinu* and left it to its own devices. It flowered profusely, the small red Turk's cap-like flowers there throughout the year proving mildly interesting for the resident tui population – although they had a preference for the closely related *abutilons* growing nearby.

After a time it became obvious that the *malvaviscus* should have been pruned from an early stage, but by the time this dawned on us it was already heading for the tree tops. It didn't matter too much as this was in a wilder part of the garden – until the year before last, that is.

Deciding that a new path would make the

garden much more interesting, the *malvaviscus* was removed. It was quite a job as it had twisted this way and that, and rooted down over a wide area, but on the plus side the stems were so thick that they became good firewood and 30 years of fallen *malvaviscus* foliage made for a rich piece of new garden in which the white *justicia* and numerous other shade lovers are now thriving.

I've always enjoyed the purple-blue flowers and even darker blue berries of *Colensoa physaloides*.

These appear at the same time on this small native, which adds to its charms considerably. This has always been an interesting, but rather too sprawling for my liking, sort of plant. Until this year that is, when by accident my *colensoa* suddenly had to cope with lots of morning sun before afternoon shade took over. Because damp shade is invariably the recommendation for *Colensoa physaloides* I had expected it to suffer, but no: that bit of morning sunshine has been its making and I now have a healthy, free-flowering and berrying plant that adds considerable interest to the late autumn/early winter scene.

This herbaceous plant is scarce in the wild now – another reason to treasure it in gardens. Look for it in native plant nurseries. It commemorates the missionary and printer William Colenso who came to Kerikeri in 1834. He combined church work with a passion for botany, sending specimens and details of previously unrecorded New Zealand flora to Kew gardens for many years. ❀



JUST DESSERTS



I have a growing sense that our northern neighbours believe us to be a little antiquated here in the top of the South

I had this confirmed to me last week when speaking with a northerner arranging a business trip south. She asked me what the roads were like here. I politely informed her they were fine and that we even have electric lighting now.

But this column is not going to do much to dispel the myth of our hobby ways. I'm talking about what passes for fun here in the winter months. After all, there is only so much banjo-playing you can take. A couple of winters ago the team here at Country Trading started a Pudding Club. And before you jump to conclusions, no I didn't know that phrase has an entirely different meaning to folks of a certain era.

When I was a kid, steamed pudding appeared most Sundays with its good friends custard and cream, and then again cold, sliced and buttered in our lunch box and as afternoon tea. So why have they fallen from favour? Because in a two-minute noodle world they take an hour or so to cook? Because the aluminium pudding steamers we all used apparently gave us dementia? Because we got health conscious and they became as popular as pork belly and chips at a diet convention? Or maybe we just stopped sitting down together for the Sunday roast.

Whatever the reason, steamed pudding is a dish whose time has come again. Good food is good food and it rises above fashion, like a pudding in a basin. It feeds our comfort genes like a warm blanket and a pair of slippers. A tummy full of steamed pudding sets the world to rights.

In winter, I remember the Pudding Club and get the steamer out.

Last year we trawled old cook books and family recipe vaults, asked our mothers and Nanas. I cooked so many different puddings that I started to look like one!

Proceedings culminated in a pudding evening at the historic Moutere Inn. The members of Pudding Club, family and friends managed to get through no less than six different steamed puddings in the course of one very memorable night.

I stonkered the crowd with a steak and kidney, complete with suet crust. Other contributions included a boozy Christmas pudding, date hangi pudding, dainty lemon pudding, sticky toffee apple pudding and a spicy sponge creation called Sinbad. We all rolled home and didn't eat another pudding for some time. But we all had become a bit addicted so we went on to write a recipe book and hunt down some lovely stainless-steel pudding basins.

Steamed puddings are a great way to use up your stash of homegrown and home-dried fruit. If you fancy making one this winter here are a few tips and tricks we picked up, plus a classic recipe.

So there you have it, pudding eating is the pastime of choice in winter months here at the top of the South. And this is a good thing – we need all the padding we can get with the state of our roads! Some of you North Islanders may even want to give Pudding Club a try. I don't think it is illegal yet to eat cream, butter and sugar in the North Island... ❀

PERFECT STEAMED PUDDING

1 Grease the steamed pudding bowl with butter all over the base and sides before pouring batter in. This helps it come away at the end of cooking. Don't use marg or oil, thank you.

2 Take the bowl and put it upside down on some grease proof paper; trace the circle, cut it out and grease with butter. Place it gently, buttered side down, on the batter before putting the lid on the steamer. This keeps the pudding moist, stops it sticking to the lid or escaping, should it rise too much.

3 Most steamed puddings will nearly double in size during cooking so make sure you leave enough headroom.

4 Fill a large pot with water so it comes at least half way up the pudding bowl and bring it to a low rolling boil. (If it is just simmering, the pudding doesn't rise and can be stodgy.) These puddings have long cooking times so check the water level once or twice and top it up with boiling water from the kettle if it looks to be getting low.

5 To check the pudding is cooked, poke a skewer in the centre.

If it comes out clean or with crumbs on it, the pudding is ready. If it has gooey mixture on it, put the lid on and place it back in the pot of water. You can also tell if it's cooked if the top of the pudding is firm and springy to touch and evenly risen with no sink hole in the middle.

CAROLINE PUDDING

My dad's favourite steamed pudding, from a 1963 fundraising book for the Ashburton Branch of the NZ Registered Nurses Assn (Inc). It is particularly fine with a good dollop of Edmonds custard and a plug of cream.

Ingredients • 1 tablespoon butter
• 3 tablespoons sugar • 1 apple, grated
• 1 heaped teacup of flour • 1 cup dried fruit • 1 good teaspoon baking soda

Mix the ingredients with milk until fairly soft. Put in greased pudding steamer. Steam for 1½ hours. Mum still makes this and says any leftovers (I don't recall there being any) butter up nicely as a loaf. It is also good made in deep muffin tins, baked at 180°C for 15-20 mins for individual puddings.



The kindest cut

Rosarians can debate pruning methods until the cows come home but the basics are simple. We prune to remove dead wood and to encourage the natural process of renewal – and to keep a rose a manageable size for our particular garden

One of my favourite gardening books is *Roses and How to Grow Them*, written by Violet Purton Biddle and published in 1903. She wrote for the suburban gardener and although her books were popular, she never achieved the fame of Gertrude Jekyll, who wrote primarily of the larger gardens of the English aristocracy. But Violet is very likeable and given to emphasising important matters with capital letters. She tells us that “loose planting is RUINOUS” and when we are sitting up straight and concentrating she goes on to discuss the “VEXED question of PRUNING”.

More than a century later it is still a vexed question. There is no great universal law that states all roses must be pruned annually. Some roses need it, some don't. If you plan to prune, July is a good month to do it. Ideally, repeat-flowering roses should be pruned just as the new growth begins but don't wait too long or you will be removing well-grown new shoots – which is a pity, but not a tragedy.

Use sharp secateurs and cut above an outward-facing growth bud.

Use a saw to remove at the base any hoary old, unprofitable canes. As a rule

of thumb, the closer a rose is to a Species (wild) rose, the lighter the pruning should be; the closer to a modern rose, the harder the pruning. Hybrid Teas, for instance, appreciate hard pruning where up to two-thirds of growth is removed. I forgot to do this to my buxom 'Celtic Cream's and they showed their disapproval by growing three metres high and falling all over the place.

Roses with twiggy, airy growth, such as the Chinas, need only light pruning, which involves removing one-third of the growth.

David Austin recommends leaving a new rose for three years before pruning so that it has a chance to establish its structure – which sounds sensible but can result in a bit of a mess, and the rose may need a gardener with secateurs to establish its structure!

Pruning climbers can be a bit of a nightmare unless they are trained from the very beginning.

To do this, it is important to bend the strong young canes to fan out from the base so they are as near horizontal as possible. This will cause the plant to send up flowering shoots all along the canes instead of just at the top. Elbow to hand is a rough guide for spacing between the horizontal canes. Pruning consists of shortening the flowering side shoots to three or four growth buds each year and removing old, unprofitable canes from the base as the plant ages.

For those of us who begin correctly, fanning out the canes, but find the whole pruning thing gets too complicated as the plant grows, help is at hand. Charles Quest-Ritson, the English rosarian and author of *Climbing Roses of the World* tells us not to bother – simply stop pruning climbing roses when it gets too difficult. Hurrah for him – but most of us knew that years ago.

And when it comes to ramblers, don't even think about pruning.

For that way lies madness – my words, not his. Let them ramble until they are taking up too much space, then call in a support group and cut them back to size.

Immediately after pruning is a good time to give the roses a final copper and oil spray to kill any fungi that may still be

alive. My roses have had their ups and downs this season. David Austin's 'The Herbalist' and the reliable old Rugosas, particularly 'Hansa' and 'Rosaie de l'Haÿ' are constant treasures. 'Albéric Barbier' still falls in loops and garlands from olive trees, and 'Madame Alfred Carrière', although cruelly bound to a tall tree fern, could manage enough flowers to scent the air in summer.

After we've snipped, sawed and sprayed, what can raise our spirits in the cold, dark days of July?

Well, a stiff drink or two would help, but if you happen to have *Roses, Roses, Roses*, the NZ Gardener Special Edition published in 2002 (now sadly out of print), get it out and bask in the luxury of the roses therein. It's the one with pink 'Sexy Remy' stretching out over front and back covers so it should be easy to spot among those piles of magazines you can't bear to part with. The photographs by Juliet Nicholas, particularly the close-up rose portraits showing every luscious curl of the petals, are food for the soul in winter and a stark contrast to the pathetic bundles of twigs outside my windows. They make me realise that winter will end, spring will come and the roses in my garden will bloom again.

'Deep Secret' on page 44 is a rose that I'm not familiar with.

But I want to touch its layers of velvety red petals on the page and when I read that it's hugely fragrant and blooms through summer and autumn, I also want it in my garden. I had forgotten just how airily beautiful 'Jaquenetta' is and I take for granted the ever-flowering 'Crépuscule' outside my kitchen windows until I see close-up images of its apricot and cream petals.

In winter it's hard to remember how breathtakingly beautiful roses are, so if your magazine collection doesn't go back that far, open your most gloriously illustrated rose book and take a deep breath...

- To buy the more recent NZ Gardener special edition *Homegrown Roses: gorgeous roses for fragrance, picking, gifts & crafts*, call 09 909 6897. \$10 including postage, while stocks last. ❀

Matthews Roses



Catherine Hybrid Tea



NZ Gardener Floribunda



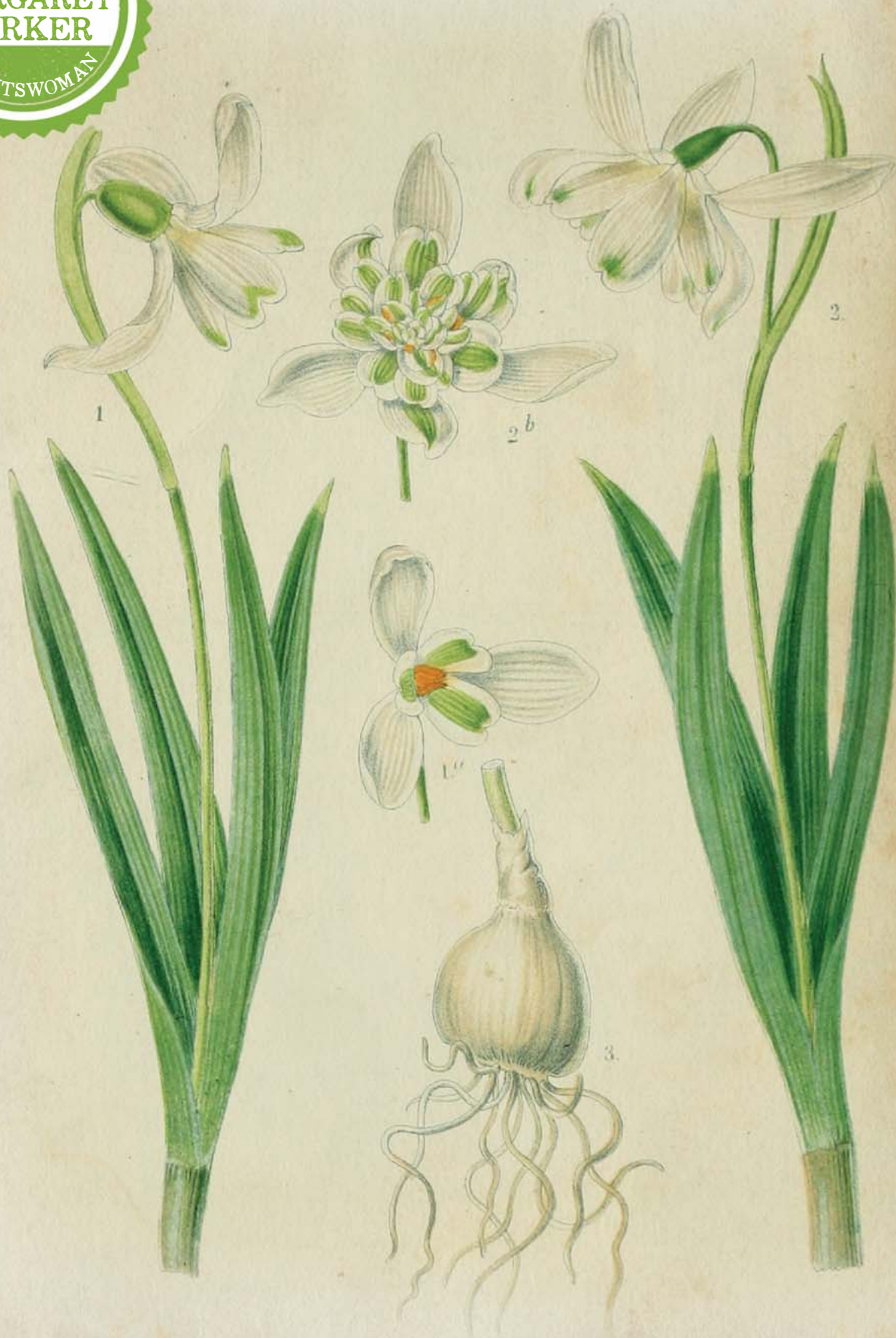
Cupcake Climber



Escimo Shrublet

**Available now from selected
Garden Centres and online**

www.rosesnz.co.nz



Snow white

I never thought I'd see galanthus flowering in the wild. It mainly happens in February, when I'm too busy to swan off to Europe

But there is one, an alpine, which flowers in late May or June. *Galanthus platyphyllus* grows at 2000m to 2700m in the central Caucasus, in both Georgia and Russia. After the Iron Curtain lifted, and in between civil wars, some of its habitat could be visited by travellers. Unfortunately, photographs identifying just where they grew were published and most of the plants were lifted for sale in Europe. All snowdrops are now protected by CITES but was it too late? Last May we visited this site, where there had been half a million plants. They had gone. But then my friend Margaret Ann found a few flowering plants, then a few more. There were also large holes in the ground where clumps had just been stolen. *Galanthus platyphyllus* can be purchased on the internet for \$60 a bulb. (We can't import it here.) But I have iPad photographs and the memory.

When days are dark, snowdrops emerge from the sodden ground.

No, snowdrops don't signal the end of winter, but as they glisten, chastely white in the low winter light, they bravely inform you that spring will come, eventually. On sunny days the snowdrops' outer petals stretch laterally. They really do. I thought I was imagining that the flowers got bigger until I read a monograph that explained that the petals' cells multiply, enabling it to lift. They've no need for Botox!

I've been splitting snowdrop clumps for years; it's cold work in the cold ground. Recently I improved my technology by purchasing an iron bulb planter from The Company Shed. Now I stand, using my new tool. With a dig,

twist and tug I make a rounded flat-bottomed hole in which I plant three bulbs with the roots spread out. This robust tool is marvellous for planting tulips too.

First to flower in mid-July at Larnach is *Galanthus* 'Atkinsii'.

Next up, at the beginning of August, are *Galanthus* 'Straffan' and *Galanthus elwesii* 'Emerald Hughes', a splendid form given to me by Denis Hughes of Blue Mountain Nursery. These are closely followed by the dainty *Galanthus nivalis* brought to Dunedin from its native France by botany professor Martin Holdsworth; also the double *Galanthus nivalis* that was present in this garden from times gone by. There is a fortnight in early August when all of these snowdrops, and others, are in flower at once. Innumerable flowers hang from thread-like pedicels, carpeting the earth in swathes of pristine purity.

There's also a small tree that lights up the garden in winter's depths.

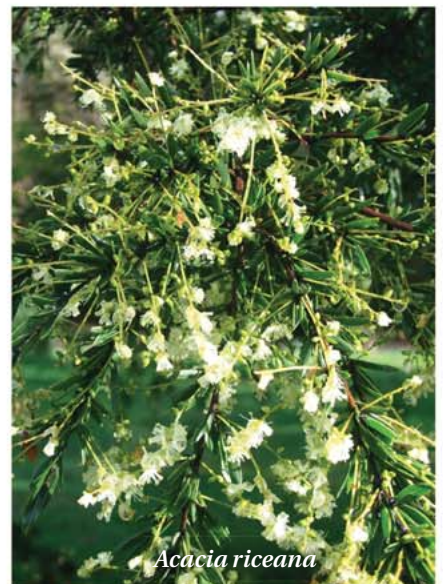
It has showers of fluffy golden flowers on deep-green weeping, evergreen branches. Its pointed leaves (they are actually phyllodes) are sharp and prickly, which is its only disadvantage. It is *Acacia riceana*, or Rice's wattle. It likes well-drained soil that is cool and damp. Rice's wattle, a hardy plant of the legume family, is endemic to south and east Tasmania where it grows from sea level to 900m. I planted a group of Rice's wattle about 30 years ago. I can share with you that 30 years is their allotted lifespan. Some are fallen; others tipping. But the gardeners saved the seed, it was sown and has germinated. A new generation is on its way. ❀



Margaret's snowdrop planter



Galanthus platyphyllus in the wild



Acacia riceana



THE RIGHT PUFF

Months ago, when autumn was in her golden glory, I stumbled across a giant puffball among the hazels in the community orchard

It glowed a creamy, eat-me glow, so I did after first frying slabs of it in garlic and butter. If you've not tried fresh puffball steaks, you've yet to discover how good and productive a single puffball can be. I fed family and friends on just half a sphere of tofu-like deliciousness. Then I made soup from the remaining hemisphere.

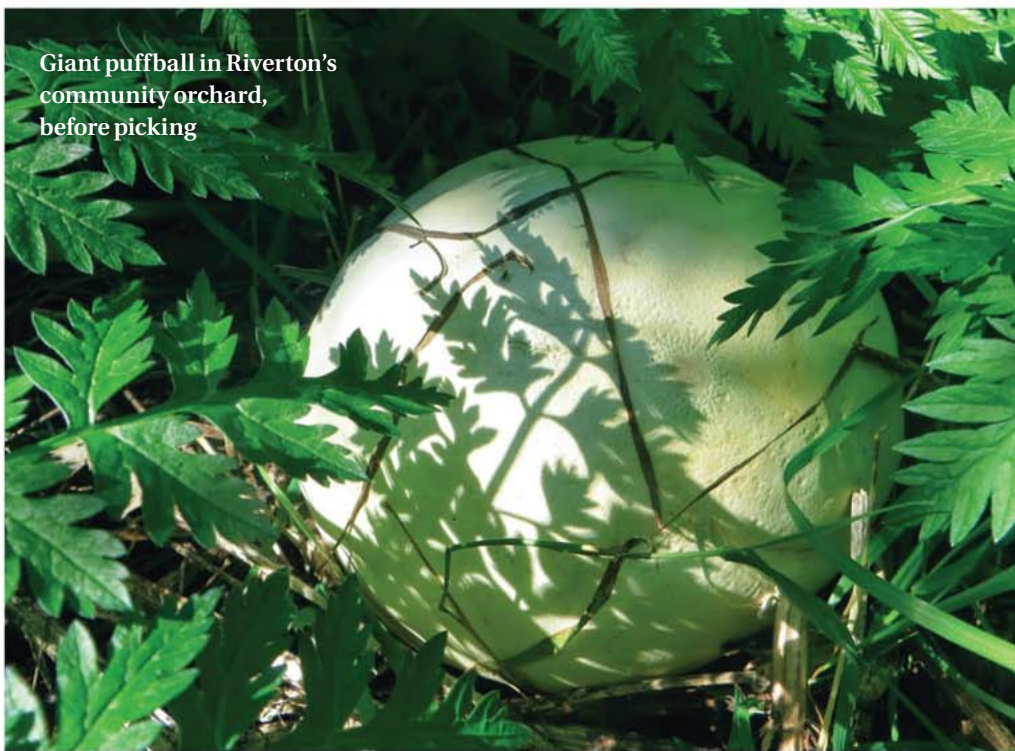
Returning to the orchard, I found more of the plump fungi. Some of them we ate, some I left to mature. Puffballs turn brown as they age and their usefulness to the cook rapidly diminishes, until they are more vacuum-cleaner dust-bag than steak. That's what I was waiting for, though, as I'd hatched a plan to inoculate my garden with the spores that are contained, in their millions, within the now-brown sphere.

So one morning in May, I walked through my forest garden, patting the fluffy brown pillow, creating plumes of spores that hung in the air before settling, hopefully to strike and spread their hyphae in the welcoming soils beneath my trees. I was astonished by the volume of spores contained within the one puffball. I walked everywhere – under fruit trees, among the berries, around the bamboos and dahlias – but still the spores kept pouring out at my patting.

If all of them grow, I'll be living on a marshmallow farm. I've no idea if this is the right time or place to spread fungal spores, but I wasn't going to waste an opportunity – after all, these represent free food that doesn't have to be fussed-over.

Encouraging fungi into your garden begins with not destroying the habitat they demand – one that is herbicide-, pesticide- and of course fungicide-free. My garden's been clean for well over 30 years now, so I'm expecting the puffballs to gleefully take up residence here, where the going is good and the living is easy.

Giant puffball in Riverton's community orchard, before picking



I've been learning about another, inedible form of fungi: white-rot.

This sounds unappealing, but I suspect they will be the more valuable fungi in the long term. White rot fungi transform twigs and branches into mush, which goes on to become top-grade humus. That dark stuff is the holy grail of gardening for me.

From here on in, I'm going to consign to fire as little wood as possible; instead, I'll leave it lying on the ground for the fungi to process. This means I'll be lugging around less wood as well. Pruning big branches and hauling them to the firewood shed is a chore that I'm happy to do less of.

July in Southland is not a month famous for its high temperatures.

It's worth remembering that when thinking about sowing anything delicate – in a Southland winter, that's just about everything. Cold in the form of frost, hail and chill air will set back the most eager seedling and hamper its development. Tunnelhouses are ideal for protecting young vegetable plants from the elements. Or pots and grow-bags can be situated wherever it's warmer and more protected. Watering, when it's necessary, can be done with warmed water and reflective surfaces can increase the amount of sunlight the young plants receive. Bricks, blocks or water-filled bottles placed nearby to moderate the temperature of the surrounding air.

Some seeds will strike in the cold and don't need to be pampered.

Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, broad beans and peas will all strike at the first opportunity, despite hail and frost. You can give them a hand, though, by warming their beds with cloches. These can be anything from a glass or plastic frame to an upturned milk bottle with its bottom cut out. Presently, I'm eyeing-up some bell cloches made of thin, recyclable plastic. They cost a little over \$1 each and, if they have a lifetime of more than one season, look like good value to me, despite my dislike for plastic in the garden.

Plant your bare-rooted fruit trees now, if you can get hold of some.

Toward the end of this month I lift the apple trees that I grafted the previous year and plant them out wherever I can find a space in my garden – or alongside a road or path somewhere in my district if I'm feeling rebellious or publicly minded. With the leaves all fallen and the young tree in hibernation-mode, now's the time to act. The least harm is done and the least shock experienced by the plant, if late July and early August are chosen for the move. If I discover, upon lifting my grafted tree, that it has developed an over-long or twisted root, I prune it back to match its mates. Early correction of wonkiness like that can mean a longer, more successful life for the tree. ❀

TRAVEL

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A gardener's road trip to Northland

From tropical plant nurseries and pristine kauri forest to yearly garden safaris, there's plenty to lure gardeners to the winterless Far North

Takou River, near Kerikeri, offers beautiful riverside accommodation in 5 acres of subtropical gardens



Deputy editor Christine Rush lists 20 attractions for gardeners from Kaiwaka northwards



On his family farm near Dargaville, Ernie the kumara king delivers an entertaining show about the history of the tuber and kauri logging

The Far North is truly heartland New Zealand: it's the birthplace of the nation, the people are down-to-earth, the vistas are glorious, and the mild subtropical climate means there's something for green-fingered visitors to see year-round. Tender plants such as palms and citrus thrive here, so point your car north, leave room in your boot, and enjoy this tranquil region.

1 SEE PERMACULTURE IN ACTION AT TAONGA GARDENS

This is a new community of organic gardening enthusiasts based on the original site of the Koanga Institute. A small shop sells organic seeds, herbs, fruit trees, compost, books and beautiful flax kete. Phone 09 431 2732; toangagardens.org.nz.

2 ONE (SWEET) POTATO, TWO POTATO, THREE POTATO, FOUR...

Dargaville is a bit off the beaten track, but if you're heading to the Hokianga or Tane Mahuta and the Waipoua Forest on SH12, first check out New Zealand's kumara capital. Warren Suckling (aka Ernie the kumara king) gives a show on his family farm explaining the history of the tuber and kauri logging; cost \$20. Booking essential, phone 09 439 7018; kumabox.co.nz.

3 ADMIRE THE ARID PLANTING AT ROCKHOPPERS GARDEN

Rosie Speedy's 4ha property near Maungatapere is popular with



garden clubs for its collection of cacti, succulents and subtropical plants and rustic farm memorabilia. Admission \$8, phone 09 434 6884. Open mid-September until April.

4 TALK TO THE KNOWLEDGEABLE STAFF AT SCIADOPITYS

Located at 460 Maunu Road in Whangarei, many gardeners I spoke to named this the region's best all-round garden centre for its service and expert staff. This independent retailer specialises in fruit trees, ornamentals and bareroot roses – it stocks more than 2000 varieties – and does all its own bagging. Phone 09 438 9715.



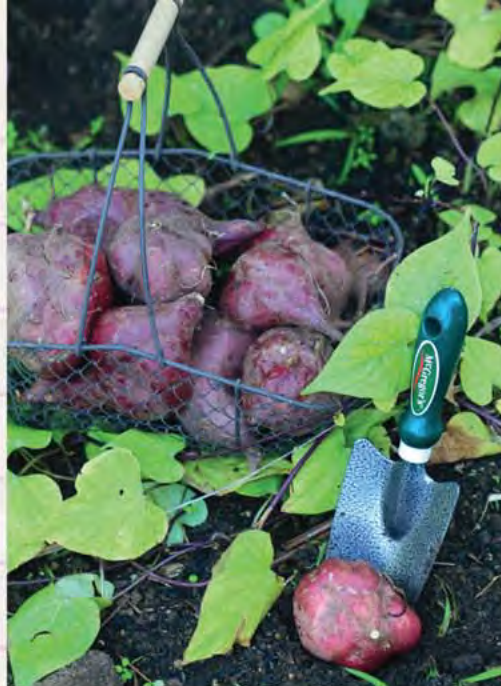
Clockwise from top: Roland's Wood in Kerikeri is a delight for lovers of bluebells and dog walkers alike; Dargaville is the home of kumara growing; see kauri up close on a eco-tour in Puketi Forest

5 WANDER IN THE FERNERY AT BOTANICA WHANGAREI

Conservationist Marge Madden was a driving force behind this fernery, conservatory and cacti house, which has an impressive collection of native ferns. Open daily 9am-4pm.

6 STAY A WHILE AT TAKOU RIVER'S MAGIC COTTAGES

Set on an organic farm just north of Kerikeri, these boutique self-catering cottages and glamping site offer a peaceful, private base for exploring the area. Paddle their canoes, soak in a hot tub under the stars, or wander in the lush subtropical gardens; see takouriver.com.



Clockwise from top left: irises thrive in the tropical Far North; 95 per cent of the New Zealand kumara crop is grown around Dargaville – they are packed with nutrients and are low-GI; *Canna* cv. 'Tall Apricot' from Nestlebrae Exotics, near Waipapa; Pompallier Mission in Russell; view from the terraces of the Whangarei Quarry Gardens



7 GO FOR A WALK IN WHANGAREI QUARRY GARDENS

Heading out of town, you'll find this wonderful community project. Formerly an industrial hole in the hillside, it is a great place to stretch your legs on the drive north. It has trails for the less-mobile, a lake and a luscious array of scented camellias. From 6-15 November it will mark the opening of its new visitor centre with a garden sculpture and floral festival. Phone 09 437 7210.

8 TAKE THE SLOW ROAD TO TREASURES IN TUTUKAKA...

Guy and Sandra Bowden own Tawapou Coastal Natives, and are experts in rare and offshore natives, grown from cuttings and seed collected on the family farm. The nursery is set within a native garden so customers can see plants in situ – and Guy's wood sculptures. Open Wed-Fri 8am-4.30pm, weekends 10am-3pm; visit tawapou.co.nz.

9 ...AND STOP IN AT RUSSELL FRANSHAM'S SUBTROPICALS

NZ Gardener columnist, designer and plantsman Russell Fransham runs a busy mail-order and retail nursery from his home near Matapouri Bay. His beautiful garden is itself worth the detour from SH1. Open 9am-3pm weekends, public holidays or by appointment. Call 027 450 4599 or email russellfransham@xtra.co.nz.

10 EXPLORE COLONIAL LIFE AT POMPALLIER MISSION

Heading north, catch the ferry from Opua to Russell. Pompallier Mission was the Catholic HQ in the "hellhole of the Pacific" but only a historic printery and charming Victorian perennial gardens, orchard and veg patch remain. Winter hours 10am-4pm; \$10 admission includes a guided tour. Phone 09 403 9015.

11 SAVE THE DATE: KERIKERI ROTARY GARDEN SAFARI

The event, held this year October 31 to November 1, showcases different gardens from the Far North each year. Visit gardensafari.co.nz closer to the date for more details.



Palms and other tropical
plants are a big draw in
the annual Kerikeri
Garden Safari

No two Kerikeri Rotary Garden Safaris are the same — held after Labour Weekend every year it
features a range of different gardens in and around the Northland settlement



View towards Russell Fransham's house, near Matapouri Bay

Russell Fransham played a key role in the design of Whangarei Quarry Gardens

— and his own property is well worth a detour off SH1

12 SPECTACULAR VISTAS AT WAITANGI TREATY GROUNDS

The Treaty of Waitangi has been called our *Magna Carta*, and a visit to the grounds is a moving and fascinating experience. A new museum opens in February 2016, but until then visitors can enjoy the charming cottage gardens at James Busby's former home, amazing views towards Russell, historic camellias and a well-signposted walks. Winter hours 9am-5pm, admission for NZ residents \$15; waitangi.org.nz.

13 STOCK UP ON LOCAL FOOD AT THE FARMERS' MARKET

Held on Thursday afternoon in Paihia and Sunday morning in Kerikeri, this is a great place to meet local artisan producers, selling lamb, goat, honey, herbs and cheese. Or visit the popular Old Packhouse Market just south of Kerikeri, held every Saturday morning.

14 STROLL THROUGH ANOTHER SLICE OF HISTORY

Kerikeri's Stone Store (1836) and wooden Kemp House (1832) are the oldest buildings of their kind in New Zealand. The oldest pear tree (planted by Samuel Marsden in 1819) is in remarkably good nick too.

15 CREATE A TROPICAL HOME WITH SOUTH PACIFIC PALMS

Established in 1996, this was taken over recently by landscaping expert Stephen Dobbs. Customers can see cycads and over 50 varieties of palms at their true (towering!) height in the gravel-pathed display gardens, all of which are propagated at the on-site nursery. Steve and his staff can also advise on design and plant choice; see southpacificpalms.co.nz.

16 RAMBLE THROUGH A (SPANISH) BLUEBELL DELL

Rowland's Wood in the outskirts of Kerikeri is famed for its bulb displays in spring. This 1.6ha community garden was gifted to the district by Roland Samson, who spent decades planting deciduous trees, bulbs and Spanish bluebells. It's now tended by volunteers and is dog-friendly.

17 SEE GENTLE GIANTS UP CLOSE IN PUKETI FOREST

Our native kauri have been hit hard by dieback disease, but those in Puketi Forest have been relatively untouched – for now. Iain Candy grew up on the farm next door and runs daytime or dusk guided nature walks into the forest; visit forestwalks.com.



Clockwise from top left: Kemp House, part of the Kerikeri Mission precinct; Guy and Sandra Bowden's native nursery; Northland is famed for its citrus; Rockhoppers Garden.



18 A PASSIONATE PLANTSMAN: AUSTEN'S EXOTIC GARDEN

George Austen and his late brother David started Exotic Nurseries in Kaitia in the 1960s. He is a local legend and still opens his gardens by appointment. Phone 09 408 0379.

19 INSPIRED TO BUY? VISIT NESTLEBRAE EXOTICS

John Prince specialises in hibiscus, exotic fruit and cannas. Open by appointment, phone 09 407 1906.

20 LEAVE A LIVING LEGACY AT TE RERENGA WAIRUA

If you don't have room in your boot for a garden centre find, why not mark your visit by planting a native at Cape Reinga? Seed for the Future is a project by local iwi to help revegetate the area with eco-sourced natives and reduce your individual carbon footprint. For \$20 you receive a certificate with the tree's GPS coordinates. For details see natives.co.nz/seed-for-future ❖

WHAT ELSE SHOULD GARDENING VISITORS SEE?

These are just a few of my favourite gardening-related places to visit around the Far North. If you know of any other must-see destinations, email mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz or post your suggestion to NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. One suggestion will win a \$200 pack of McGregor's tools including a spade, fork, secateurs, loppers, a rake and a plastic garden bag. Entries close July 31, 2015.



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DAPHNE 'PERFUME PRINCESS'

is a compact bush with lush foliage and large, strongly scented flowers in winter. Produced by Taranaki plant breeder Mark Jury, the flowers are up to four times the size of other daphnes. It also grows in full sun. It's available from garden retailers now.



HELLEBORUS 'BLUE BLACK'

is one of the joys of winter and early spring. This stunning variety has dark blue-black flowers, and grows to a height of 50cm. A hardy, clump-forming perennial, it's suitable for perennial borders or woodland gardens. From Wake Robin Nursery.



'CLASSIC MAGIC MIX' CORNFLOWER (CENTAUREA CYANUS)

is a blend of tall varieties in shades ranging from light mauve with dark centres to almost-black with white-tipped petals. These are great cut flowers, and edible as well. Available from Kings Seeds' new catalogue.



COSMOS BIPINNATUS 'XANTHOS'

is a dwarf cosmos that has striking lemon-yellow blooms with a gold centre.

Compact and well branched, it's an eye-catcher in summer. It's fast growing, maturing 70 days from sowing. 'Xanthos' has won a Fleuroselect Gold Medal, awarded to new varieties that supersede existing varieties. From Kings Seeds' new catalogue.



'LAZY HOUSEWIFE RUNNER'

is new to Kings Seeds but it's one of the oldest documented (1810) runner beans. It has 12-15cm long, straight green pods with a solid meaty texture, distinctive white seeds and a great taste. A highly productive bean.



'CHEF'S CHOICE ORANGE F1'

from Kings Seeds has firm flesh and a rich tomato taste. It has 250g beefsteak-type fruit that is resistant to cracking. Productive and disease-resistant over a long season. A top performer in American field trials.



LILIUM SPECIOSUM VAR. RUBRUM

is a vigorous heirloom tiger lily with sprays of pendulous, recurved, raspberry-pink flowers in late summer. It also produces one of nature's most fabulous perfumes. Grows to a height of 1.5m. From GardenPost.



LILIUM LEICHTLINII (TURK'S CAP)

has recurved, butter-yellow petals, long anthers and lots of mahogany freckles. The stems can produce up to 20 flowers and will grow up to 2m tall. An heirloom species, available from GardenPost.

GIVEAWAYS



INSPIRE: THE ART OF LIVING WITH NATURE

We have three copies of Willow Crossley's book (distributed by Bookreps NZ, bookreps.co.nz) to give away. Beautifully designed, this has over 50 projects and decorating ideas using natural materials. Transform flowers, foliage, vegetables and foraged items into seasonal displays. From Cico Books, RRP \$39.99.

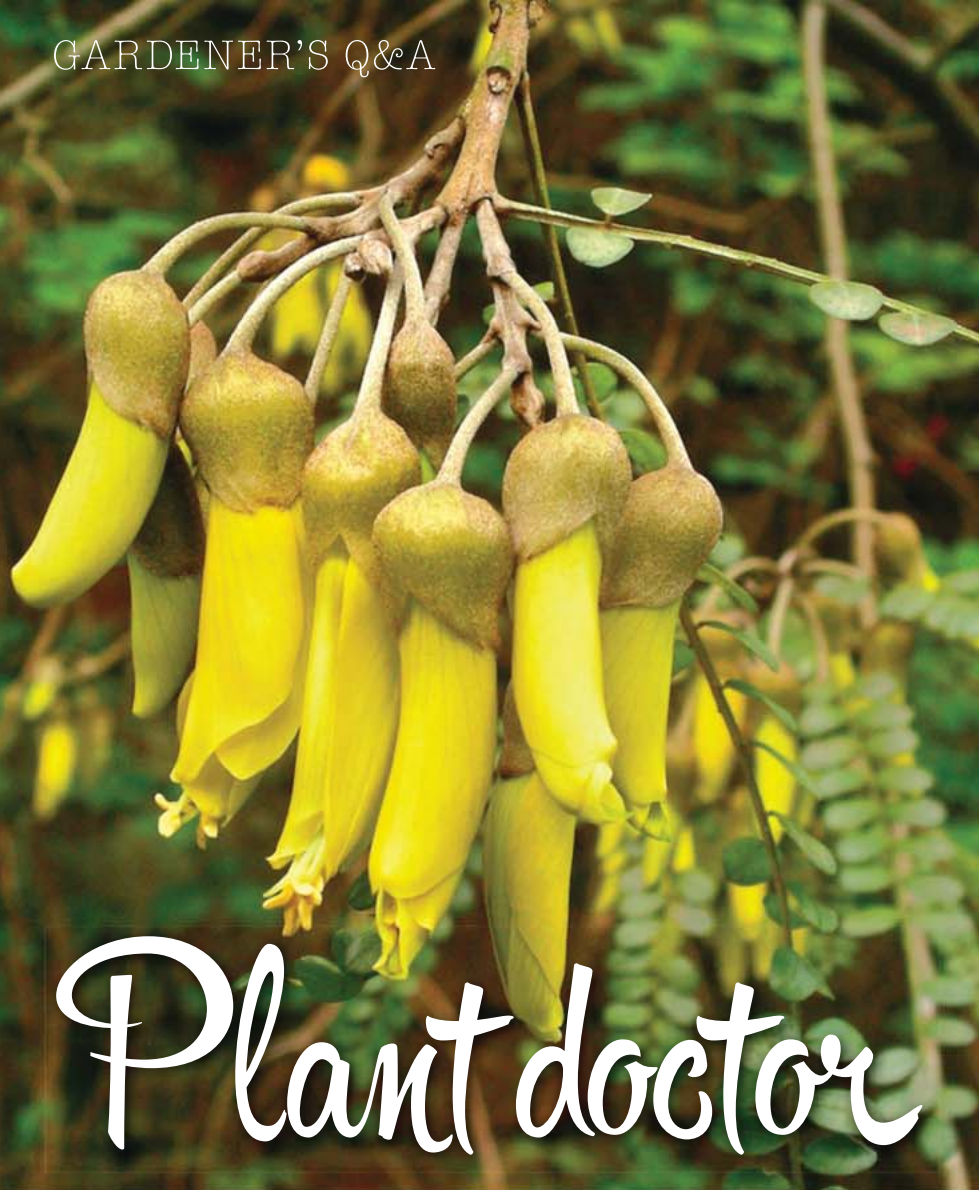


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Packs include a Tui Dual Feeder, 5kg Tui Wild Bird Seed and a Tui Nectar Feeder. Food for birds is scarce over the cooler months, so it's the ideal time to establish a regular supply in your backyard. Tui Wild Bird Seed Mix is free from artificial colours and flavours and can be used in the Tui Wild Bird Feeders to tempt a variety of birds into your garden. The Tui Nectar Feeder provides an instant food source for nectar-feeding birds like tui and bellbirds and attracts them with its bright, nectar-like colour. All Tui feeders are well-constructed, weather-resistant, and easy to clean and refill. Find out more at tuiproducts.co.nz.

COMPETITION ENTRY DETAILS

Write your contact details and choice of prize on the back of an envelope and mail to Garden Giveaways, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. Or enter online by visiting nzgardener.co.nz. Entries open June 29 and close July 27, 2015.



Plant doctor



Q A NEW ROSE
I've grown a new rose from seed. How do I go about registering it? Are there rules about naming roses?
THOMAS LEONI, DUNEDIN

A The American Rose Society (ars.org) is the body that handles the process of registering roses. The site for online registration with The International Cultivar Registration Authority is stsr.com/irar/irar.htm. Registering roses is not compulsory.

It can take around 10 years to get a new rose onto the market. Testing and evaluation is important and it takes time to determine whether a new rose is worthy of being introduced commercially. At the same time the number of plants also have to be increased. Most new roses in New Zealand are entered into the New Zealand Rose Society trials in Palmerston North (nzroses.org.nz), which run for two years. You can apply for Plant Variety Rights (pvr.govt.nz) once the decision has been made to commercialise, which provides some protection over propagation.

Naming a rose is harder than it seems. A good name helps sell it; a bad name doesn't. Generally rose names should be three words or fewer and if it is being named for a person, then permission should be sought. It is also worthwhile checking that there isn't something with the same name or similar already on the market.

Hayden Foulds, NZ Rose Society

Q OUT OF SEASON
I have noticed several cases of early flowering this autumn. My 'Christmas Cheer' rhododendron flowered in early April instead of midwinter, a kowhai flowered in mid-April instead of spring, and a maple tree lost its leaves very early. Is there an explanation for this type of behaviour?
RUSSELL ROBINSON, WELLINGTON

A It's probably weather-related but it could just be the particular plants. Last summer was unusually late and dry.

Mark Brown from Blueskin Nurseries Wholesale says that *Rhododendron* 'Christmas Cheer' is the earliest one to flower and it's not unusual for April flowers to appear.

Denis Hughes at Blue Mountain Nurseries has been collecting and propagating kowhai for many years.

He has one kowhai variety or another in flower from April to November. By mid-May this year his Stephen's Island and 'Dragons Gold' kowhai had been in flower for over a month. If the kowhai is one that usually flowers later, Denis said that it is due to drought-induced dormancy. Rain (or irrigation) after a prolonged period of drought kickstarts the flowering cycle so a variety that normally flowers later could flower early this year and the same applies to 'Christmas Cheer'.

The maple losing its leaves is due to dry conditions too. After a cool, wet spring, the tree adjusts to hot, dry weather by dropping leaves to reduce loss of water by transpiration.

Plants under stress, fooled by variable temperatures or artificial light can also flower out of season.

Barbara Smith



Q **BROWN RHODOS**
The leaves of two of my dwarf rhododendrons are browning at the tips. A third planted nearby is healthy. What's going on?
 ANDREA CRAWFORD, TE PUKE

A The most likely reason is lack of water at some stage in the growth cycle. When a plant cannot get enough sap to maintain itself in a turgid state, its natural instinct is to reduce the leaf area exposed to the sun, hence the brown/silver section at the tips of leaves.

Another reason for brown tips is when a plant is growing in heavy soil and the new feeder roots have come up against an impenetrable wall. The plant shuts down part of a leaf as there aren't enough new roots to feed the shrub through the growing season. Planting a rhododendron too deeply can also show this amount of burn, as can too much fertiliser or too frequent feeding.

In the first instance a remedy for heavy soil and probably too small a planting hole, or too deep as mentioned above, is to dig a trench in a half circle around the plant close to the drip line. Replace with more friable compost-enriched soil and slow-release fertiliser and keep well watered. Next winter do the other half and your plant should reward you with fresh growth and hopefully an abundance of flowers the next spring.

*Rodney Wilson,
 Cross Hills Nursery and Garden*



Q **HYBRIDISING HOLLYHOCKS**
Last year I saved seed from a yellow hollyhock, expecting the new plants this year also to be yellow. To my amazement the new plants bloomed in many different colours and forms: soft pink, bright red, apricot, pale lemon, white and green, and single-frill and multi-frilled layers. Why would this happen?
 EILEEN MANDEL, NEW PLYMOUTH

A This is a question that intrigued Charles Darwin himself. In the 1860s he planted hybrid hollyhocks and collected the seed. He wanted to see which varieties bred true and the relative fertility of different crosses. He wrote to other breeders asking for advice and the results of their hollyhock experiments.

A few years earlier, Gregor Mendel, the father of genetic science, was experimenting with hybridising peas. He found that when a yellow pea and a green pea were bred together, the offspring plant was always yellow. However, in the next generation of plants, the green peas reappeared at a ratio of 1:3. He proposed the terms dominant and recessive to explain this phenomenon.

A hybrid occurs when two closely related plants are crossed, either naturally by an insect visiting two flowers or by a plant breeder with a paintbrush. The resulting plant is called an F1 hybrid and can show improved traits inherited from both parents which is known as hybrid vigour. They carry genetic code (DNA) from both parents but only the dominant genes will show.

The seeds of these F1 hybrids will contain a mixture of all the genetic traits of the first generation so the



resulting third-generation plants will show a variety of phenotypes – a mixture of flower colour, leaf size, plant size, vigour and disease resistance and so on.

Some of the phenotypes may be desirable to a plant breeder. A phenotype with resistance to powdery mildew, for example, would be worth back-crossing with the mildew-resistant parent until the offspring reliably show the same resistance.

In nature, genetic variety means that a population as a whole is less vulnerable to environmental changes. For example, in a very wet, humid season some of the plants will succumb to mildew but the resistant ones will survive to produce seed for the next generation. Some plants die but the population carries on.

If a population all has exactly the same genes it can be wiped out by one disease, as happened when 'Gros Michel' bananas succumbed to Panama disease.

This is why it is important to maintain worldwide genetic diversity by keeping seed banks of as many plant varieties as possible. We don't know what challenges climate change or pest evolution will throw up so we'd better be ready with some genetic insurance!
Barbara Smith

WILD CARDS

New Zealand has beautiful native plants that are found nowhere else in the world. Here's a fun way to learn their names

KID PARADE



EMILY COKER (1½)

of Palmerston North helped deadhead the roses and daisies.



CLEO STITT (1½)

of Waikanae loves being out in the sun watering mum's garden.



ALIAH BAILEY (4)

of Beachlands tackles the dirty jobs in her great-aunt's garden.



HESTON MCCARTHY (4)

grew a giant pumpkin in his nana's Hamilton garden.

KNOW YOUR NATIVES

Kids will love playing these card games – and it's a great way to learn to recognise some of our special native plants

To help teach your kids and grandkids about our native plants, we've made up a set of native plant flashcards! To receive a pdf, email mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz with Wild Cards in the subject line. To print, use a colour, double-sided printer and light A4 card stock. Set your printer to duplex to print pictures on one side and names on the other. Or print the picture pages only for Snap and Memory games. Cut cards to size. Pages could also be printed separately onto paper and pasted onto card.

GAMES TO PLAY

FLASH CARDS Use one or two sets of picture cards with the names on the back.

To play: One player: look at the picture and say the name. Check on the back: were you right? Keep going until you know them all.

Three or more players: One player is the quizmaster who shows each picture card to the other players. Other players take turns naming the plant and keep the card if they are correct. Player with the most cards wins. Choose another quizmaster and play again.

MEMORY Use two sets of picture cards with plain backs. **Two or more players:** Turn all the cards upside down and shuffle them around. Players take turns to turn over two cards at a time. If they match, the player keeps the cards. If not, turn them back over but remember where they were for later in the game. Collect the most pairs to win.

MEMORY PLUS Print one set of picture cards and one set of name labels.

To play: Same as Memory above but match each picture to the correct name.

SNAP Print two or more sets of picture cards with plain backs.

Two or more players: Shuffle the cards and deal out evenly. Don't look at your cards. Place them face down in front of you. Player to dealer's left begins by turning over the top card and placing it next to their stack. Next player to the left does the same and so on. At any time, if you notice that two cards on the face-up piles match, shout, "Snap". The first person to do so takes all the cards from matching piles and adds them face-down to the bottom of their face-down stack.

Continue as before, starting with the player to the left of the last one who turned a card.

If you have no face-down cards left when it comes to your turn, simply turn over your face-up pile to make a new face-down pile and turn over the top card as before. If you have no cards left at all, you are out of the game. The last player in is the winner.

When turning up cards, don't peek at it before the other players can see it. To ensure this, cards should be turned over facing away from the player, so that if it is turned too slowly the turning player will see it last.

If a player shouts snap by mistake when there is no match, that player's face-up pile is taken away and put in the centre of the table, where it become a snap pool. If this happens several times there can be several snap pools. If the top card of any player's pile matches the top card of one of the snap pools, the first player who calls "snap pool" takes both piles.

SNAP CHALLENGE Same as above, but match picture cards with name cards.

Send in your photos to win gloves and a set of tools from Omni

Each photo published on these pages wins a pair of kids' gloves and a set of garden tools from Omni Products. Visit omniproducts.co.nz to see the full range. Send your photos to Kids' Mailbox, NZ Gardener, PO Box 6341, Wellesley St, Auckland 1141. Or email your digital photographs (approximately 1MB in size) to mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz.

Please make sure your child is looking at the camera and include his/her age and your postal address.



CAMERON MCGRAW-ALCOCK (aged 6) of Christchurch climbed high to pick buckets of pears.

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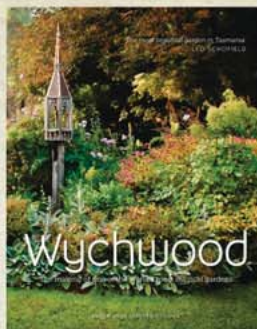
And a garden broom to clean up



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Bookshelf



WYCHWOOD

By K Hall & P Cooper. Allen & Unwin, \$75

With its cool-temperate climate and mountainous interior, Tasmania has much in common with New Zealand. Peter Cooper and Karen Hall were drawn there in 1991 to live self-sufficiently and immersed themselves in the task, planting an orchard, vege patch and perennial and herb gardens on their smallholding. Their passion for plants turned into a gardening business and

nursery, eventually taking over the farm. This book details the history of their now-famous garden, Wychwood, plus there are tips, plant lists, how-tos, recipes and a useful list of their garden jobs season-by-season (all based on Australian seasons of course, but easy enough to adapt to New Zealand conditions). There are plenty of lovely photos to drool over too. If you are looking for an inspirational read over winter, look no further than this. *Christine Rush*

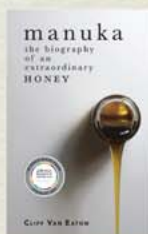


BIRDS OF NZ

By Barrie Heather & Hugh Robertson. Penguin, \$55

Many twitchers will have an earlier edition of this hefty field guide in their daypack. For those new to birdwatching, this fully

revised edition is the definitive source for identifying both native and exotic species – I particularly like the birdsong descriptions: “Male song a loud jingling burst: *ti oly oly oly oh*” for the tomtit. It includes a summary of key birdwatching sites across the land. It’s a very text-heavy guide, supported by 85 plates beautifully illustrated by Derek Onley (the final two show the species sadly lost since 1900). *Christine Rush*



MANUKA

By Cliff Van Eaton.

Exisle Publishing, \$34.99

I thoroughly enjoyed this book, maybe because I am a beekeeper! It chronicles the history of beekeeping here, starting with the first

skep hives brought over by a female settler, and the development of the honey industry. It is hard to believe that only a few decades ago beekeepers were doing all they could to prevent their bees collecting manuka honey and often had to dump it as there was no market for it. Anyone who enjoys history, is a foodie or who loves learning about the role of this fascinating insect will enjoy this book immensely. *Janet Luke*

Events guide

NORTH ISLAND

July

• Matamata Mid-Winter Christmas Festival.

Matamata Bible Chapel, Meura St, Matamata. Thu, Fri 10am-6pm; Sat 10am-3pm. Ph 07 888 8752, 07 888 0914. **July 2-4**

• Wellington Botanic Garden: growing trends.

Find out what's trendy in the plant world and how to grow it. Meet 1pm, Begonia House. **July 5**

• Auckland Tree Crops sale.

Fruit trees: heritage apples and pears, sub-tropicals and unusual varieties. Resources, equipment and tools. Experts on hand to give advice. Covered courtyards, Auckland Botanic Gardens, Hill Rd, Manurewa. 10am-1pm. Free entry and parking. More info at treecrops.org.nz. **July 11**

• Wellington Botanic Garden: birds.

Secrets about the birds that live in our gardens. Meet 1pm on the Treehouse deck. **July 12**

• Tupare: winter workshop.

How to keep garden beds warm. 487 Mangorei Rd, New Plymouth. 2-4pm. 0800 736 222. tupare.info. **July 12**

• Tree sale, NZTCA Bay of Plenty Branch.

Katikati A&P Show Grounds, Major St (just north of Katikati). Tree cropping and plants for sale. Cash only. 10am-12.30pm. Sellers: phone 07 549 2795. **July 18**

• Holland Gardens: beekeeping workshop.

Getting started, tools, looking after hives and caring for honey bees. 1686 Upper Manaia Rd, Kaponga. 2-4pm. 0800 736 222. hollandgardens.info. **July 26**

SOUTH ISLAND

July

• Dunedin Botanic Garden HortTalk.

Speaker: Louise Kilby, Taranaki Spring Festival. Information Centre, lower botanic garden, near duck pond, 12 noon. Free. dunedinbotanicgarden.co.nz. **July 3**

• Marlborough Home & Garden Show.

Marlborough Lines Stadium 2000, Kinross St, Blenheim. Fri-Sun 10-5 daily. Adult \$5, senior special Friday \$3, under 16 free. homeandgardenshow.co.nz. **July 3-5**

• Otago Lily Society bulb auction.

Downs Room, Mosgiel Library, Hartstonge Ave, Mosgiel. Opens 12.30pm for viewing and general bulb sale. Auction of rarer bulbs starts 1.30pm. Contact Margaret 027 352 9646. **July 4**

Free event listings.

Email your event details (at least 10 weeks ahead) to: mailbox@nzgardener.co.nz with “Event Listing” in the subject line.



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- **Hydrangeas & other plants – Woodleigh Nursery.** Mail order New Zealand-wide. Photo catalogue: woodleigh.co.nz. Descriptive catalogue: send \$5 to 300 Mountain Rd, RD3, New Plymouth.
- **Lily & spring bulb 2015 mail order.** Coloured catalogue available. Gift vouchers. www.lilyfields.co.nz or ph Mt Somers Lilyfields, David & Wendy Millichamp on 03 303 9743. Orders despatched NZ-wide from May.
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- **Grab a Plant – online newsletter.** Exciting plant and bulb specials every month. Register at www.gardenpost.co.nz
- **www.dahliahaven.co.nz**
- **www.kiwiclvivia.com.** Clivia specialists.
- **www.lavender.org.nz**
- Find growers, products, useful information. New Zealand Lavender Growers' Association.
- **www.magicmoss.co.nz**
- For all decorative moss and moss requirements.
- **www.marshwoodgardens.co.nz**
- For hardy perennials
- **www.matakanasculpturalhabitat.co.nz**
- **www.mrclematis.co.nz**
- **www.mushroomgourmet.co.nz**
- **www.potteringaboutgardencentre.com**
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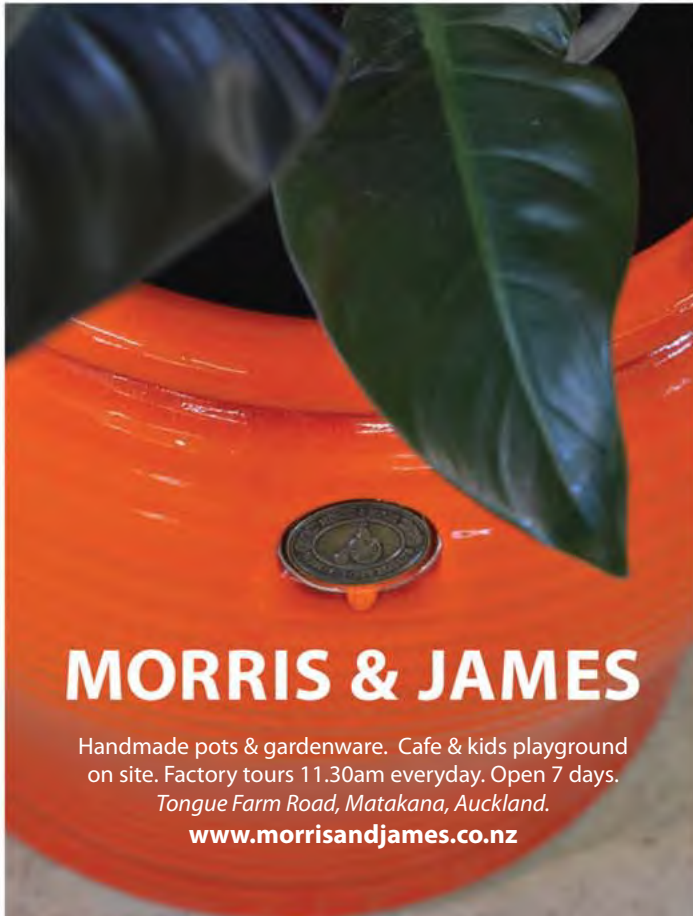


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joe bennett

In which winter extends its icy tendrils across the land, prompting Garden Tool Man to issue a stern warning on the maintenance of motorised equipment

Hi, Garden Tool Man here. I've lost count of the number of times people have yelled out to me at Garden Tool conferences (and I'm not talking teensy trade fairs here, I'm talking the real thing with VIP delegates from everywhere that's anywhere in the global Garden Tool community): "Hey, Garden Tool Man, how do I prepare my Garden Tools for winter?"

"Break it to them gently," I yell back, which gets a snigger from the ladies. The ladies, you see, don't take Garden Tools seriously. As Roger Ride-on Rickets put it at the plenary session of the Shanghai Mower Fair in 98: "Give a woman a trug and a trowel and she thinks she's tooled up." An exaggeration perhaps but there's truth in it. What matters most to women is plunging their fingers into the soil. Earth is their everything. Whereas for the men, thanks be, gardening means Garden Tools. Were it not for testosterone, I'd be out of a job.

So, despite the sniggers of the girls, the overwintering of Garden Tools is a matter that deserves to be addressed seriously. In order to address it seriously one must answer two questions – A: What sort of tools are being prepared?; and B: What sort of winter are they being prepared for?

Tools come in two sorts: motorised and insignificant. Motorised tools need to be prepared for winter; insignificant ones don't. They don't because they're becoming obsolete. Take the rake, for example. Primitive people used it to gather leaves into a pile. Today we do that job with a motorised blower. The improvements are legion. The blower makes a lot of noise, it can be turned from suck to blow and back again to make a fun job last all day, it requires trips to the garage to collect fossil fuel and it has an engine to tinker with. So by all means leave your rake out all winter to rot, but please bring the leaf blower in by the fire.

Winters themselves are less easily categorised than tools, because they range in intensity. At the Yukon Toolfest, for example, the general advice for over-wintering a weed-eater is to shroud the thing in oilcloth and then to smear it with at least an inch of grizzly fat. (Brown bear fat is cheaper, but it tends to go rancid,

as old Horse-Power Higgins discovered to his cost in 07 with his mini tractor. Come spring he couldn't get near it for the smell. And no one would take it off his hands. Had to hire a team of huskies in the end to haul the thing out of town and tip it into the Yukon River. How we all laughed. Served him right for trying to cut corners.)

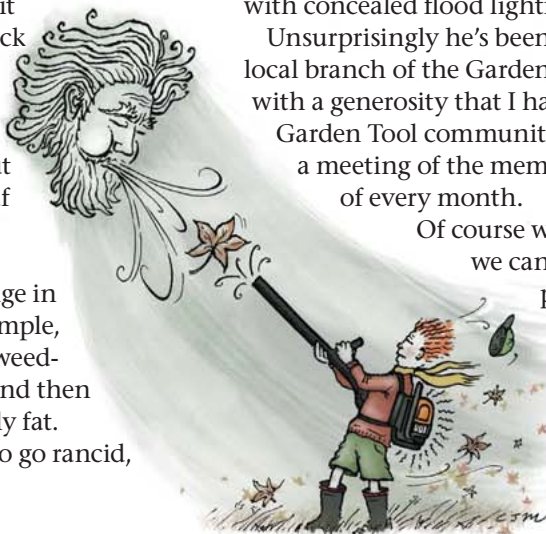
Of course New Zealand isn't the Yukon, but our winters can get nasty so it pays to look after your Garden Tools even in the supposedly winterless north. And the further south you live the greater the precautions necessary.

Old Brm Brm Bunker from down Waimate way shows the sort of thing that is possible. Brm Brm's always been proud of his collection of Garden Tools and a few years back he got so nervous about the damage a severe winter might wreak on them, that he built an all-weather tool shed you'd be happy to live in. Centrally heated and topped with a mansard (or gambrel) roof that is a source of wonder in the neighbourhood, the shed covers the whole of what was previously his garden.

Within its double-brick, double-glazed, double-insulated walls, Brm Brm's top-rating collection of Garden Tools has survived in effectively mint condition. And because he no longer has to waste time or money on his garden, it being entirely buried beneath the Garden Tool shed, he has not only been able to maintain his collection he's also been able to add to it. To such an extent indeed that he is now thinking of building a mezzanine floor within the mansard (or gambrel) roof, with concealed flood lighting for display purposes.

Unsurprisingly he's been elected president of the local branch of the Garden Tool Enthusiasts Club, and with a generosity that I have found to be typical of the Garden Tool community, he throws open his shed to a meeting of the membership on the third Thursday of every month.

Of course we can't all be Brm Brms. But we can all prepare our Garden Tools properly for winter to ensure that the moment spring peeps its little snout back over the horizon our engines will be ready to roar. Happy gardening. ❀



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